



ugvm

The uk.games.video.misc Magazine

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Build and go fourth...

Issue 05

ugvm

Champion of justice in a distant planet and far away place, the planet New Texas floats deep in space...

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Issue 05

Welcome

Hello again! Sorry I have not written for so long. I have been out catching insects and trying to catch fish! I did like the shirt you sent me but I have put it in the bin. Jim has spilt tea all over it.



Don't worry, the rest of the magazine's not written in **Animal Crossing** style. If you're wondering what the hell that's all about, see our review of Nintendo's masterpiece on page 18. Meanwhile, apologies for the delay between last issue and this - real life (and Animal Crossing!) has been getting in the way somewhat.

Fear not, loyal readers, for we are back again with another fantastic issue! Two football game reviews compliment our huge feature on the **Evolution of Football Games**, which also features an exclusive interview with **Match Day** programmer **Jon Ritman**!

The rest of our review section is full to bursting with old and new games - including our cover game, **Sim City 4**, and **ugv.retro** boasts a review of the long awaited **Dragon's Lair 3D**.

Sadly, this month the **ugvm** big red book has been stuffed in a cupboard, and so there is no "life of ..." to speak of. Instead, there's an in-depth look at some of the least successful consoles of all time, and an in-depth examination of the Korean open-source handheld, the GP32.

Been worth the wait, dontcha think?

deKay (Editor)

What's Inside This Issue...



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Talk With The Animals...

Review Scores Explained

ugvm uses a marks-out-of-5 system for scoring games in the reviews. We feel that percentage systems are silly, with there being little difference between, say, 75 and 76%. Marks out of 10 are often pointless as well, as very rarely do games score under 5 or 6/10. Having 5 points to the scale lets us get down to the nitty-gritty: is this game any good, or is it just a pile of old pants?

You can think of the scores as being roughly equivalent to these simple to digest phrases:

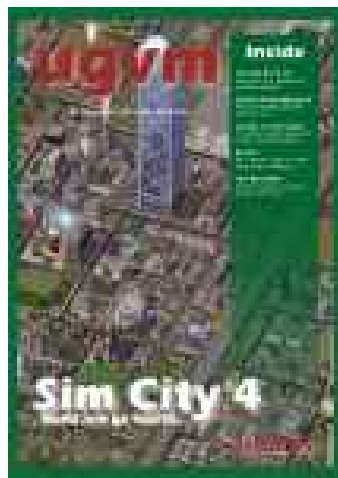
1/5 - "Not even worth a look"

2/5 - "Only think about it if you're a real fan of this type of game"

3/5 - "Average. Probably still playable, but not the best of it's kind"

4/5 - "A good game, perhaps with just one or two minor flaws"

5/5 - "You need to own this game. Now."



Awards

Games which score 4/5 also gain the coveted **ugvm Silver Award**, and games achieving the top marks of 5/5 are awarded the even more fantastic **ugvm Gold Award**. These awards are to show that these games really are something you want to play.



Comment

Jumpers for Goalposts

OJLim gets a conversion (That's Rugby, you dolt! **Tim**)

I hated football as a child. I couldn't dribble to save my life, it was the boring sport to watch, (actually, ALL sports were boring to watch) and, no, I didn't know the difference between club and country. All this would change with the arrival of an Amiga game called Sensible Soccer.

I remember reading the review in Amiga Format and just wanting this game so much. The review made it sound like the best game ever. When I finally got it, I fell in love. I'd play the game for hours (always England vs Estonia, because those were the two teams mentioned in the magazine review) and would never tire. Even Syndicate hardly got a look after that. "This is football? This is what I had been missing?" I'd think to myself.

Okay, in retrospect, it didn't play much like football at all, but it was damn enjoyable and hence started my love affair with football games. It didn't have to play like football, as long as it was fun. FIFA on the SNES was great in two-player co-op mode if you turned off the fouls, because your mate could shove all opponents to the ground while you dribbled towards goal. Virtua Striker was great because, er, well it looks lovely but it ate all my money up - can I borrow 50p please?

FIFA 96 changed everything though. It looked real, it had that man from the World Cup commentating, (John Motson, I would later learn), and wow, you can score from a bicycle kick!

But slowly, the simulation aspect of football won me over and eventually Konami came and took my life away. Heck, I even enjoy watching football now, I just can't get over the fact that none of the players on the screen listen to me.

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ugvm News

Playstation 2.5

Sony are remodelling their Playstation 2 console, with a few tweaks along the way. The new PS2 will have the supported ability to play copied media (CDRs and DVD-Rs), although it would be foolish to expect pirate games to play unaided.

The unit supposedly runs quieter than the original (which is the noisiest of the current consoles), will boast a DVD remote with a tray eject button, and will also lose the iLink port. Sony believe that the network adapters can perform the same system link function for multi-console multiplayer games.

Currently, only Japan will be getting the new system, at a slightly higher price than the existing PS2. This rise in cost is mostly due to the new machine being a little more expensive to manufacture. Sony's share prices have dropped slightly as a result of this announcement.

Mario Kart GC Finished!

Shigeru Miyamoto has announced that Mario Kart GC, the long awaited Gamecube iteration of the popular Nintendo racing series, is actually complete! However, for reasons known only to himself, no pictures have been released, and very few details are certain.

Unfortunately, it seems that the much debated online capabilities of the game have been scrapped, but a two Gamecube, 8 player console linking system is being touted. Perhaps Nintendo are waiting until E3 for the grand unveiling.

UK GBA SP OK!

You can tell something special has happened to the Game Boy recently, with the sudden surge in posts to **ugvm** sister group uk.games.video.gameboy. The reason? Nintendo's newly redesigned Game Boy Advance, the GBA SP, was released in the UK and Europe.

As reported in **ugvm04**, the SP has a backlit (well, more 'sidelit' really) screen, a built-in rechargeable battery, and it folds in half to protect the screen and reduce the size.



The first batch of SPs to hit Japan sold out within 3 hours, such was the demand for the sleek new model, and although not quite that extreme, European sales were brisk. Nintendo showed an uncharacteristically generous side on launch too, by bunging a £30 voucher for a Gamecube in the SP box. With Argos selling Cubes at less than £80 at the time, you could potentially get a new Gamecube for under £50 with a game and memory card.

Xbox Live! Launch

Microsoft's online gaming service has launched properly since the last issue of **ugvm**, after successful trials. The take-up in Europe has not been as quick as in the US, however, despite Ant and Dec hosting the launch party - or more likely *because* they hosted it.

There are about 50,000 European Live! customers, which compares badly to the 250,000 or so US subscribers to the service. One factor blamed is the

low proportion of Europeans who have a broadband internet connection - a requirement for the Live! service. NTL have partnered with Microsoft in the UK to offer an Xbox Live! specific broadband package. However, this only seems to be the standard NTL broadband package with official support for the Xbox thrown in for an extra fiver a month.

That might not sound like a bad price, but remember - you have already paid for your Xbox Live! subscription, plus many games carry a separate monthly fee too.

Stop Press! Namco have announced a proposal to merge with Sega, and hope to prevent the Sega/Sammy merger as a result. Sega are "looking at Namco's proposal but have not set a deadline for a decision". First indications show that Sega would be the 'surviving' company after the merger, should it go ahead.

Cubic Box

In the past few weeks, a few of the ugv* groups were surprised to hear of the apparent cross-compatibility of the Gamecube and Xbox. While nobody's found a way to access the Gamecube directly, a couple of hacker groups have found ways of adapting DVD drives to read Gamecube discs. And what they found has surprised many.

It's well known that the Gamecube runs on a PowerPC chip, leading to "PC versus Mac" comparisons of Nintendo's console against Microsoft's. But just as the Mac can run many PC applications, it seems that Nintendo have built in some sort of translator for Pentium 3 commands. And what's more, this is well known about.



On examining the code on Acclaim's Burnout, it was found that much of the programming was identical to the Xbox version, with only the hard drive access rewritten, and Nintendo's translator embedded in the code.

Attempts to use the translator in other games have so far had mixed results. Halo's been

converted quite well, but only runs with a prototype of Nintendo's SD card adaptor for saving data. Other games (such as Blinx) have, however, presented problems with the amount of RAM they use - the Gamecube has less than the Xbox. The translator subroutine has proven to be quite unstable, often working only half the time.

"The FRAIL LOOP [the hacker community's name for the translator] could be definitive for the Gamecube," one hacker has said. "If we had some way of writing to Gamecube discs, the market could be flooded with ports of every great Xbox game." However, Nintendo will not be releasing the disc's details any time soon - as well as allowing Xbox ports, it would open the way to Gamecube pirates.

nVidia Exclusively Blag EA

It looks as though PC gaming may take a turn for the worse in the coming months, as nVidia (manufacturers of the GeForce range of video cards) have signed a deal with EA.

What this means, is that some EA titles could be specifically optimised for the nVidia graphics chipset, and some game features may only be available for those players with the nVidia card jammed in their PC. Although owners of other chipset cards (such as nVidia's main rival, the ATI Radeon) will still be able to play the EA games, they might not get the full experience.



ATI have not officially commented on this allegiance, but surely it must respond in some way, as EA is the world's largest computer game publishing company.

This is more than slightly disturbing if it is allowed to continue, as we don't know where it will end. Will we soon have DVDs that only have special features on Sony DVD players? Or how about websites that can only be accessed from Time PCs? Your thoughts to the usual address.

Xbox Price Drop

Following slightly flagging sales in UK recently, Microsoft have chosen to drop the price of the Xbox once again. The new price point is £130 for a console, whereas a Metal Gear Solid and Halo pack will set you back £170.

Microsoft have also started their own budget titles range, with games such as Buffy, Project Gotham and Dead or Alive 3 coming in at £20.

This all comes soon after the recent unofficial Gamecube price drops, which greatly boosted Nintendo sales and saw the GC outsell the Xbox for the first time in recent months. Nintendo too have a "Players Choice" budget range at £20, with games including Pikmin and Super Smash Brothers: Melee, and have a Metroid Prime hardware bundle currently in the shops for £130.

The upshot, of course, is more bargains for you lot!

Playstation 3 before 2004

Several high-profile websites have been reporting that Sony have brought forward the release of the PS3 to this year, perhaps as early as mid-year according to some sources. Sony have supposedly denied this, however.

Bloomberg News seem to have started the reports off, after mentioning that the Chinese Commercial Times have supposedly had a tip-off from Taiwanese part suppliers stating that the

new Sony box will be released this year.

Sony's previous 'official' release date was 2005, but it seems that one of the main PS3 chips (known as "Cell") is now almost ready to go and so perhaps the launch has been moved as a result. Whatever the reason, it seems odd, especially as the PS2 is still selling in such high numbers. Even the aging PSOne is still being snapped up.

Microsoft Prevent Gamecube Online

Apparently, GAME - the UK's largest videogame chain store, are reluctant to sell Gamecube broadband adapters and modems. Naturally, everyone is blaming Microsoft, with unconfirmed claims that the Xbox manufacturer have paid off GAME to delay sales of the Gamecube online products until after the Xbox Live! has had a

chance to sway everyone away. The Gamecube adapters were supposed to be available a week before the official Xbox Live! package, along with Phantasy Star Online.

Far be it from us to point fingers at Microsoft, but it certainly smacks of their style.

Dixons Group Drop Gamecube

Or don't. They've certainly dropped the price, to £99 with a game. The whole range of games have also dropped in price, to £25. Despite the posts in assorted newsgroups (including **ugvm**) and web forums declaring "LOLOLOL!! GAYMECUBE IS DEAD!! LOLOLOLOL!!!11!", DSG (Dixons' parent company) have stated only that they are "reconsidering the Gamecube's position".

We have to admit, it doesn't look good. However, with pre-orders for Zelda: The Wind Waker breaking all known records in the US, and the release of some top titles over here (Resident Evil

0, Super Monkey Ball 2, Metroid Prime, etc.), Dixons may end up backtracking. Argos have recently followed Dixons into cutting the price of the GC (to £78.99 with a game and 3rd party memory card), but decided not to ditch the console after huge sales.

Further incentive for Dixons to reconsider comes in the form of another rumour - Nintendo may withhold stocks of the Game Boy Advance SP from DSG if it drops the Cube. It wouldn't be wise of DSG to ignore this threat either, if the huge sales of the SP in Japan are anything to go by.

ATI on-board for next Nintendo console

It has been confirmed that ATI "will develop products with Nintendo", but what these 'products' are is still under wraps. It has been known for some time that Nintendo are working on a successor to the Gamecube, and it seems likely that ATI are co-developing that.

Alison Holt, a spokesperson for Nintendo of America says that "Most people are going to speculate that it's for a new system, but at this point, nothing can be confirmed,". Well of course it's for a new system. They can hardly be co-developing an old system, can they?

EA and Eidos don't go Live!

Electronic Arts and Eidos seem to be dismissing any claims that they're developing Xbox Live! compatible software. The reason supposedly given by Eidos is that "Microsoft controls the system and manages subscriptions itself, leaving no incentive for a publisher to collaborate".

No word is given (rumour or otherwise) of Eidos' plans for online games on the Playstation 2 or Gamecube, but it appears that EA Sports at least will be producing online GC and PS2 titles.

Can We Kick It?

Tim Miller (with help from **Ste Parker** and **Mike Jenkins**) looks at how a game based on kicking an inflated sheep's bladder around has evolved into the ultimate in post-pub entertainment.

1966. England win the world cup, the nation rejoices. Sales of Subbuteo kits are astronomical, as people look to recreate the achievements of their heroes. Children flick Hurst up the pitch, dribbling the ball, round one defender, around another ... some people are on the pitch, they think it's all over ...

... and for Subbuteo, it may well be. In January 2000, Hasbro announced that it planned to stop the manufacture of little plastic men on hemispheres. There was an outcry among the fans, and Hasbro relented - but the fact that their sales have fallen quite so much is indicative of a new kid on the block. Step forward, the football videogame.

At this time, I will take a little time to explain to our American readers (since I know we have several now) that this article talks about association football, which is that odd game where people kick a ball around with their feet. The one that the rest of the world plays. If you were hoping for the football where you use your hands, well, sorry.

Kick Off

The first football game is a topic surrounded in controversy. On many of the early home consoles, a Pong variant had a couple of extra bats at either end, was recoloured, and labelled as 'soccer'. Pong was, in fact, adapted to recreate almost every sport. After all, it was hardly an accurate table-tennis simulator in

the first place ...

The first game that represented football in anything other than a simple bat-and-ball game was Championship Soccer, released on the Atari VCS in 1980. Having said that, the game was hardly one to set the world alight. Each team consisted of four men (or, rather, blobs) - the goalie (who was pretty good at keeping the ball out of the net), and three others, who ran around in a V-shaped formation. You controlled all three of these, at the same time. You ran into the ball, and pressed the button to make some strange stick come out of the blob. That then hit the ball up the pitch. If the ball went in the goal (which only happened if you hit it diagonally across the goalmouth), you got some snazzy firework animations.

Mike Jenkins: "It was, and remains, utterly shit."

This was an Atari game, which makes the task of describing the making-of process rather difficult. Atari never credited their programmers anywhere, and Championship Soccer was no exception. However, thanks to the power of the Internet, we can name the programmer as ... Steve Wright. This was Wright's one and only game, yet he went on to be head of Atari's console games division and stayed with the company for a good number of years afterwards. Despite his continued work in the industry, we found it impossible to track him down.

Evolution Timeline

Football crazy, soccer mad...



1979 Championship Soccer



1982 International Soccer



1984 World Cup Soccer



1986 Five-a-Side Soccer



1986 World Cup Carnival



1989 Match Day 2



1979 Soccer



1983 International Soccer



1985 Match Day



1986 Peter Shilton's Handball



1988 Emlyn Hughes International Soccer



1989 Kick Off

Feature

We'll never know why Championship Soccer was a four-a-side game...

... or why the four members of the team were known as Crash Morgan, Nick Danger, Lumpy Duran and Alexie Putsnowski.

An Early Rush

After the faltering start, football games came thick and fast. Soccer on the Intellivision had players that almost looked human, in a Lego-man type of way. International Soccer on the 2600 allowed players to (almost) accurately pass the ball between each other. International Soccer on the C64 (no relation) had a ball that bounced on the ground. Luckily, Arctic's World Cup Soccer was around to ensure that not every game was an improvement - it was dire.

Football offered an ideal opportunity to programmers. The rules were relatively simple, and familiar to almost everyone. People didn't have the skill to play "proper" football in the park, but they wanted to - and videogames gave them the opportunity. It wasn't just the playing, either - in 1984, Kevin Tom's Football Manager was released, and sold in great numbers (though, as Your Sinclair put it, "mainly because it was released on everything from the ZX81 to the Tefal HY9000 De Luxe Deep Fat Fryer"). People were hooked on managing their own team, creating an offshoot genre of management games which we won't be covering here - suffice to say, they've evolved too. While researching for this article, Ste Parker replayed Football Manager, and said, "God alone only knows how I managed to spend so many hours playing this; the lack of depth is quite simply frightening."

Big things were afoot on the action side. In 1985, Ocean software released Match Day, as a direct competitor for the football games that were making people buy C64s. Jon Ritman, programmer of Match Day, says on his website: "we talked to distributors

about what style of game they wished to see on the Spectrum, it was pretty unanimous; they wanted the Spectrum version of the C64's International Soccer." While starting to code the game, Ritman happened to meet David Ward of Ocean, who was looking at the abysmal World Cup Soccer. "I made a wild claim that my football game would be a thousand times better than Arctic's. He must have made a note, but I just forgot it at the time. Nine months later, as I was in the final weeks of finishing, he rang me and asked me if I had ever made 'that football game'. I told him it was nearly finished, and on the spot he offered me more money than I had ever heard of."

Match Day was a superb game. The computer's AI made the game tricky to play, but the players controlled fluidly, ensuring that losses were because the computer was good, not that the game was bad. The game was the first with a shot power meter, the first with convincing ball control, and it stayed at the top of the Spectrum charts for over two months. Football games had hit a new benchmark.

Games over the next few years were evolutions, not revolutions. Match Day was unbeaten, even by its own sequel. As Ste recalls, "I spent ages playing this one on my Spectrum, and recently downloaded it out of nostalgia. Wish I hadn't - been far too spoilt with ISS over the last few years. Still, it must have been good for the time, and if you asked me they should have stopped before Match Day 2 which wasn't nearly as good." Mike agrees: "Match Day was my favourite footy game until the release of Sensible Soccer, me and chums would play it for hours on end as the two player mode was quite brilliant and a real test of skill. An interesting thing about this game was that it was apparently impossible to shoot along the floor when using a joystick as you needed to press left and right at the same time."

One notable exception to the evolutionary path was World Cup Carnival. This was a step back - literally. After running out of budget due to huge advertising



1989 Microprose Soccer



1991 Konami Hypersports Soccer



1992 Gazza 2



1993 Sensible World of Soccer



1993 Striker



1994 Dino Dini's Soccer

1990 Kick Off 2



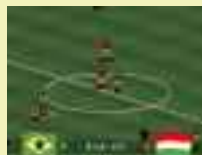
1991 Sensible Soccer



1993 Goal!



1993 FIFA International Soccer



1994 Empire Soccer



1995 International Superstar Soccer



Jon Ritman Speaks

ugvm was lucky enough to talk to the man behind Match Day, **Jon Ritman**..



Not sure, as there were certainly some real bummers released around this period!

Conversely, what's your favourite football game?

[laughs] My own Super Match Soccer on PC.

Did you expect Match Day to go on to be the success it was? Some people still play the game today, and it almost always features in "top ten" lists.

Not when I started writing it, I wasn't even a football fan - in practice the game itself made me realise how football could be interesting.

Have you worked with Chris Clarke since? To what extent was he involved in programming Match Day?

No, that was the only time - Chris only programmed the front end.

I understand you weren't involved in the ports of Match Day to other computers. Mike Jenkins has said, "Match Day was my favourite footy game until the release of Sensible Soccer ... but the C64 versions of Match Day were horrendous." Were you disappointed with how they turned out?

The Amstrad and C64 version of the first Match Day were pretty dire and I was very disappointed that so little care had been taken -

with MD2 I took a far more involved position, programming all the Z80 machines myself and having a line by line translation done for the C64.

Were you involved in any of the more recent Match Day 'updates' - Super Match Soccer on the Playstation, for example?

I designed the game and ran the teams creating it but many parts were still a little disappointing - still it is a great game to play and easily my favourite soccer game.

What do you think of the way that football games have evolved - the biggest sellers going for style over substance, or do you prefer the ever-greater realism found in Konami's PES games?

With all the games I have played I am let down by how little control you have, everything appears to be automated and I feel a lack of satisfaction scoring a cool goal and knowing that a five year old with his eyes shut could have done as well.

Finally, word is that you're working on a 3D engine for the Game Boy Advance, V-id. Chances of a 3D Match Day Advance?

The V-id project has been on hold for some time but may yet be resurrected however it would not be suitable for a soccer game.

Shame!

As we understand it, Match Day was mainly intended to be the Spectrum's answer to the C64's International Soccer (or, at least, that's what the distributors wanted). What other games influenced you when you were writing it?

I was at a trade show, and myself and co-author Chris Clarke asked a distributor what sort of games he wanted to sell; he told us that customers were crying out for a Spectrum version of IS, a game I had never played but had seen frequently in Dixon's shop windows. Match Day was finished without me ever playing IS as I didn't want to copy it in any way - the only game with any direct influence was Arctic's soccer game but only because it was so bad and I was determined not to make the same mistakes ...

Is World Cup Soccer still the worst football game you've played?

1995 Virtua Striker



1995 Actua Soccer



1995 FIFA 96



1996 VR Soccer



1996 Microsoft Soccer



1997 ISS 64



Feature

expenses and publicity campaigns, US Gold bought the rights to Arctic's World Cup Soccer, and released the game unchanged, but in a bigger box and for double the price. Amstrad Action awarded the game 0%, Crash said "World Cup Carnival is an appalling game", and Zzap64 believed the game was "hyped drivel which should be thrown into a deep dark hole and left to die."

Half Time

Intriguingly, the biggest revolution in football gaming on the home computers was to revert to a system used right at the start - the viewpoint switched from one showing the pitch from a stadium point of view, to an overhead camera. Kick Off, programmed by Dino Dini, showed the pitch as seen from an airship, with only the players' heads and shoulders visible. Mike remembers the game well: "The Speccy version was nice, the first proper overhead footy game. Good passing system, far too easy to score, riddled with bugs. Despite this, the sequel (the Amiga version was the one I had) was completely crap, resembling more of a pinball table than a game of football."

Ste slightly disagrees about the sequel, however. "Kick Off 2 improved all the annoyances in KO (what they were I can't remember, but there must have been some because I never played it much compared to this). Incredibly fast paced, incredibly easy to miss the ball when running along, too hard to control with anything like a joypad (I was all over the shop with the Master System version of Kick Off) ... but a good game."

The overhead shenanigans of Kick Off paled into insignificance a couple of years later, however. Sensible Software, after their reasonable success with Microprose Soccer, introduced a game with players what were only 12 pixels high, the ground was almost plain green, and there was one control button. Sensible Soccer was, and is, a masterpiece.

Ste: "Better than KO2? I think so. You could actually see other teammates who you were passing to, the AI was more intelligent ... but editable teams probably did it. Nothing like being able to easily make a team full of every swearword you know."

Mike: "The pinnacle of 2D football games, Sensible Soccer (and its sequel-with-management, SWOS) remains one of the best football games available - it will absorb hours of your time, especially in the SWOS management mode. Probably my most played computer game of all time, and arguably the best multiplayer game in existence."

Building Towards a Shot

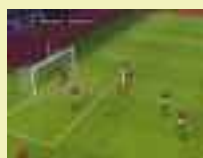
Released at the same time as the console versions of Sensible Soccer, EA waded onto the scene with FIFA International Football. The game was new, it was different, it was exciting ... yes, we are talking about FIFA here. The game introduced an diagonal isometric viewpoint, in an effort to allow you to see as much of the pitch as possible. However, the viewpoint made aiming difficult, and random goals were more frequent than those that had been planned.

Mike remembers the problems with the game more acutely: "The game looked wonderful, sold millions, and was great until you realised that most of the work was being done by the computer. Pressing 'shoot' while facing the wrong direction and having a shot fly into the top corner is a crap excuse for entertainment, and it got very old very fast (except not all that fast, as the players moved as if their boots were made of lead). This problem apparently still exists in the latest version of FIFA."

FIFA introduced another unwelcome addition to the football genre - updates. FIFA 95 was barely different from the original game, but with slightly different teams and tournaments. FIFA 96 on the Megadrive and SNES was almost identical.



1998 Sega
Worldwide Soccer



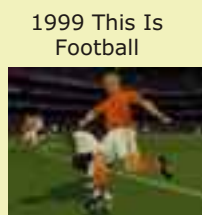
1999 UEFA
Striker



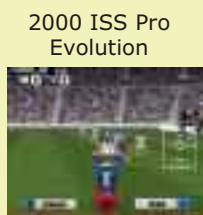
2002 90 Minutes



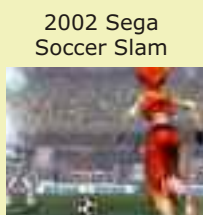
2002 ISS 2



1999 This Is
Football



2000 ISS Pro
Evolution



2002 Sega
Soccer Slam

2002 Pro Evolution Soccer 2



While FIFA was stuck in a rut, however, new games were arriving to spoil the party. Sega made waves in the arcades with Virtua Striker, a fully-3D-realised polygonal game, with a very arcadey feel to it. The 3D approach was brought to the Playstation and Saturn by Gremlin, with the amusingly-named Actua Soccer, and to the Playstation and PC by VR Sports with VR Soccer.

Actua Soccer, while graphically astounding, wasn't the best football game ever. When asked, Mike replied: "It was a boring yet pretty footy game. It looked nice, but had the slight problem of having stupid ball physics and being no fun to play. The sequels were even worse."



Actua Soccer

EA naturally brought its FIFA franchise to the Playstation with FIFA 96, which saw a total overhaul of the game engine to match the visuals of Actua and VR. The game was fun to play, if a little shallow, but looked astounding. This was a good thing, as the game engine was simply refined time and time again for newer releases ...

Except recently, when EA's been putting a little more effort behind its FIFA games. FIFA 2002 introduced new passing mechanisms to give the player more control. And FIFA 2003 is ... shhh! ... quite good.

And that brings us up to date. Hmm, something's missing.

GOAL!

Back in 1984, a game called Soccer was released on the MSX computer range. It was a rival to Match Day 2 for the best football game on the MSX, but it never sold in huge numbers. You can play it online at http://www3.brfree.com.br/vgc/emus/msx/roms/konami_soccer_JAVA.html

The team behind Soccer wasn't put off, however. Several years later, a football game on the NES was more of a critical success - Konami Hypersports Soccer made full use of the NES's two buttons, to play

a passing game more than any other videogame before.

Hypersports Soccer became Perfect 11. Perfect 11 became International Superstar Soccer. ISS became ISS Deluxe, Winning 11, Goal Storm, ISS64, Perfect Striker, ISS Pro, Winning Eleven 3 World Cup, ISS Pro 98, ISS Pro Evolution, Winning Eleven 2000, ISS 2000, ESPN MLS Gamenight, ISS Pro Evolution 2, Pro Evolution Soccer, ISS 2, and Pro Evolution Soccer 2. And those are just some of the games in the series.

Ste's experience of Konami's games came after Hypersports Soccer. "Thank god for the SNES and the final emergence of a proper footy game, where you had to pass the ball or you were never going to score. Similar to all those side arcade games (usually by Tecmo), but with a little more control. Going back to the first versions from what we have now isn't that pleasant, but not that bad either - you can still tell what the current stuff was based on. Without this series getting any success, we might never have reached the heights of the Pro Evolution series, and as such EA may have continued with its crap representation of the game forever."

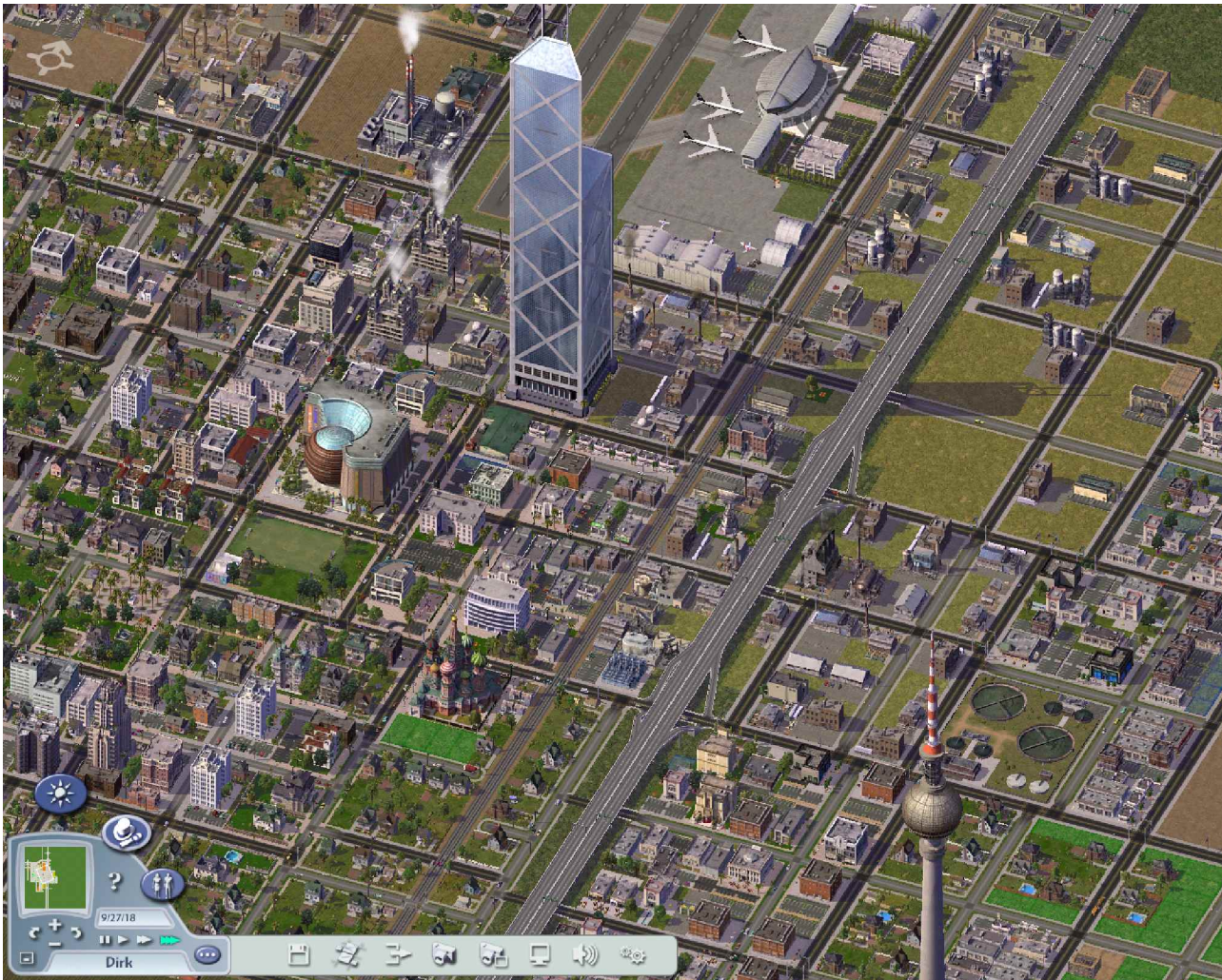
Mike feels that the series hasn't been a continual progression, however. "Pick of the lot for me is ISS 2000 on N64 and ISS on PS2. ISS2 has taken a bit of a backward step and PES is far too serious for my liking." Indeed, the different directions of the big two names (ISS and PES) are due to them being coded by different teams. The ISS name is now more arcadey (competing directly with FIFA), and PES is much more of a simulation.

ISS2 and PES2 are almost indistinguishable from the first ISS games on the SNES. In some games, the players have real names, instead of made-up ones (Koppers, Hasimoto, Galfano) or subtly altered ones (David Deckham, Freddie Ljungqvist). The intelligence and skill of the goalkeepers has been increased enormously. Controls are tighter, and more fluid. But the game retains the need for a passing strategy that's made it the best football series to date.

Full time score: ISS 3, other games 2

Extra Time!

It's not over yet! Check out our football game reviews in this issue, with 90 Minutes (Dreamcast) on page 15, and Winning Eleven: Final Evolution (PS2) on page 22.



Sim City 4

deKay plants a bungalow and watches it grow into a sprawling Metropolis. Minus Superman, of course.

Imagine, if you will, a game that lets you design and build your own Metropolis. A game that allows you to decide on housing schemes, road placement and utility service funding. A game which puts you in control of taxes, schools, hospitals and policing. You're imagining Sim City.

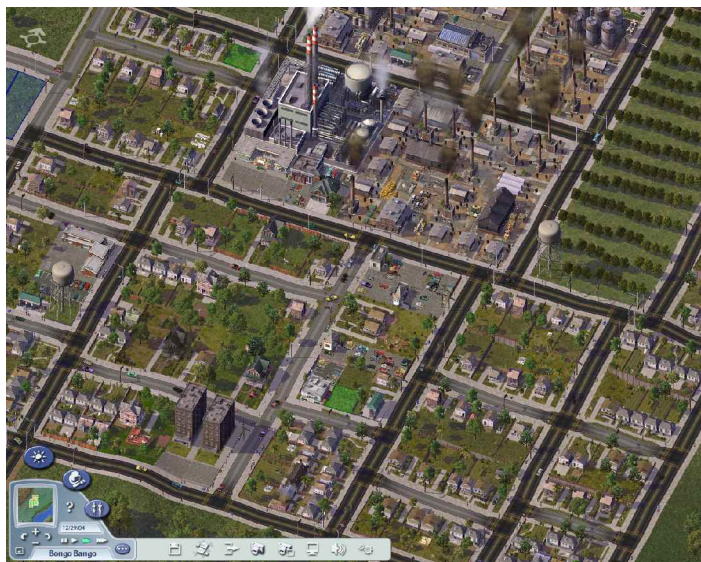
Or Sim City 2000, Sim City 3000, or even Sim City 4 (no "000" - they've changed the naming scheme). That, ladies and gentlemen, is the main flaw with this otherwise outstanding simulation game - it isn't that different to the previous three iterations of the series. Well, the previous two at least, since Sim City 2000 was actually quite a step up from the original.

For those of you who haven't played a Sim City game in the last 15 years (for that is how long Maxis have been making them), perhaps a description of what you do is required. You start off with a patch of land, and some money. You, as the mayor of your newly established settlement, start building - some residential areas, some industry for the population to work in, some commercial units (such as shops and

offices), and so on. Naturally, these buildings need power and water, so you also have to build power stations, water towers and pumps, as well as a means of getting the stuff to your residents by use of power lines and pipes. Your people (called "Sims", perhaps unsurprisingly) also require roads, and later, railways, to get about too.

Just as in real life, these things all cost money both to build and maintain. You don't have an unlimited supply of cash either, so you need to recoup some from somewhere. This means taxes! Sadly, although high taxes would bring in more dough per month, your Sims don't take kindly to paying through the nose for your wanton spending and move out. You need to budget wisely! As your city grows, the need for other necessities increases. Soon your Sims will require a school, a hospital or a fire station. Woe betide any mayor that doesn't supply these amenities, as a fire can quickly destroy your city, and a nation of illiterates won't bring home the bacon (and therefore, your tax monies).

So far, so exactly like the previous games. What does Sim City 4 bring to the table? The most obvious change is the presentation. Heavily influenced by Maxis' "The Sims", you'll instantly recognise the icons, buttons and navigation tools present in Sim City 4. You can even play your own MP3s as the soundtrack, if the provided jazz gets on your nerves. Another obvious difference is the angle at which you view your city - it's now skewed slightly. Although it now looks better than previously as a result of the angle change, it can make lining up (for example) two roads more difficult and a little frustrating. Perhaps to help fix this problem, road placement is now a little more intelligent, as it will automatically create curves, diagonal roads, and suchlike for you. The same applies to rail, power lines and pipes too. This also helps create more natural looking cities, which don't look too grid-like. Buildings can now be placed on uneven and even sloped (to a degree) ground, and will automatically either flatten it out, or compensate for the unevenness. You can still flatten, raise and lower land manually, of course.



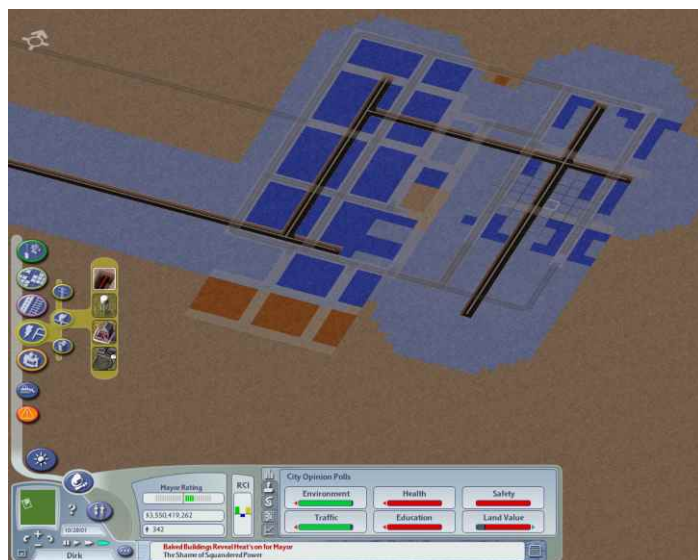
Graphically, Sim City 4 is fantastic. You only have to look at the screenshots (or even the front cover of this issue!) for testament of that. What the pictures cannot convey is the immense detail put into each and every building and unit in the game. When you zoom in, you can actually see the Sims walking around. The car showrooms have balloons tied up. There's washing on washing lines. The football stadium has players on the pitch. It is staggering, and you can spend ages just looking at stuff, rather than getting on with the task in hand.

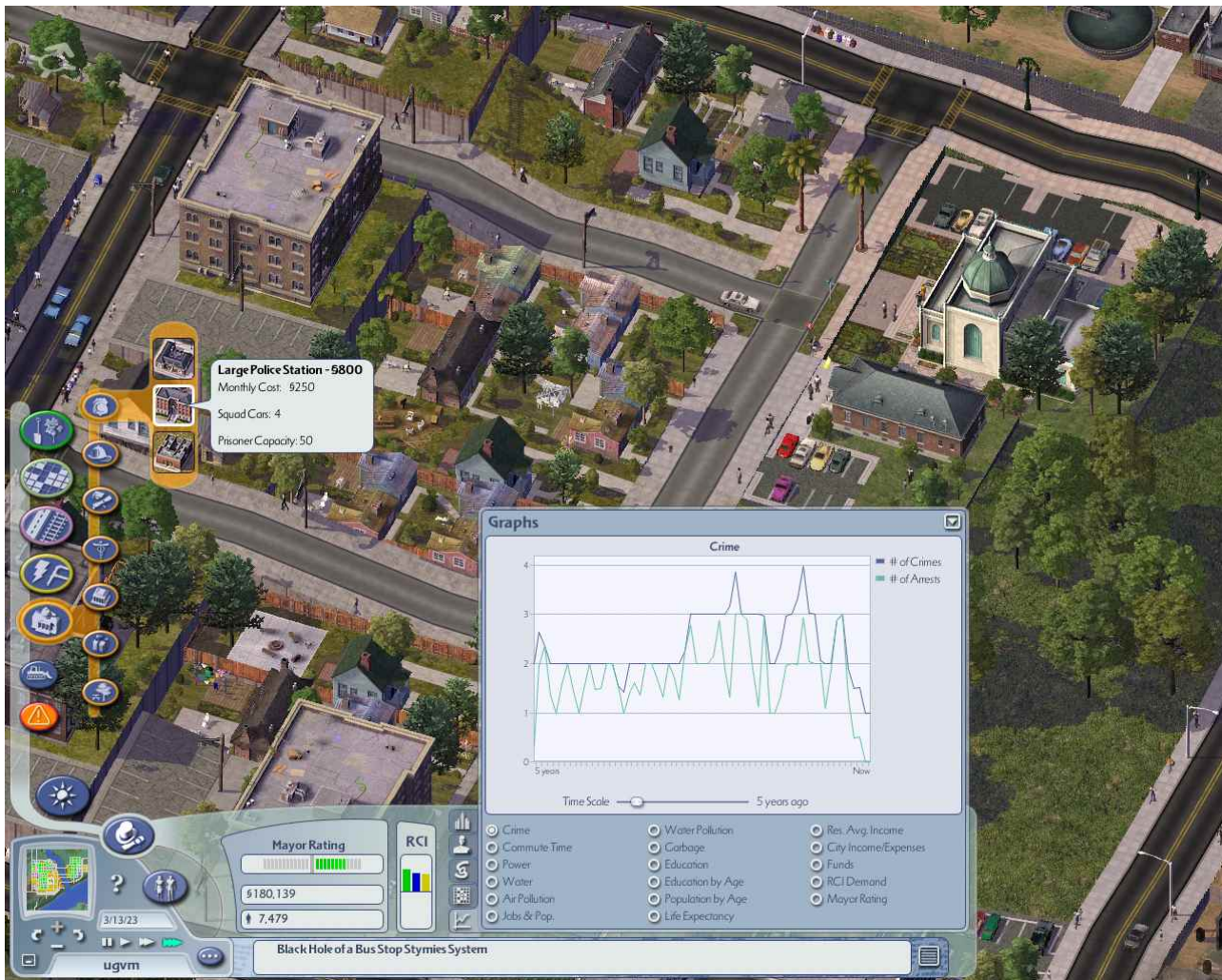
Further side-tracking can be achieved by use of one of the other new features to the series - the ability to create or import your own Sims into the game. No, you can't control them, and no, you don't get their houses and things from The Sims either. What you do get, is a recognisable "man on the street" (assuming you're at the highest zoom setting, of course!) who



can provide you with personal feedback on how you're doing your job. Other feedback comes from your Advisors, who act much like those in Civilisation to provide you with advice on planning, funding, and such. As with the previous City games, you get newspaper reports regularly as well, with headlines ranging from the useful "Budget outlook grim" to the surreal "Researchers find that Llamas have perfect hoof/eye coordination for driving". These reports often suggest a course of action, and provide handy links to graphs, tools or locations saving you a bit of fumbling when looking for the right things to click. This illustrates one of the ways in which actually controlling and interacting with your City has been made easier. The whole interface has been tweaked to allow quicker and more intuitive control than in previous games.

It is just as well too, as there is a stack of different information to look at and deal with. From setting taxes for individual wealth categories, to viewing air pollution or water coverage. You can set funding on a school-by-school basis, for school bus coverage radius (which affects the school catchment area), or





invoke a city ordinance such as a youth curfew act, or a paper waste reduction programme. There hasn't been a game with so many numbers in it since Championship Manager. You have to balance the books quite tightly too, and to start with it is fairly difficult to keep an eye on where all your money is vanishing off to. Legalising gambling may bring more money in, but it also bumps the crime rate up meaning you need more funding for the police force. Every action has a reaction - good causes cost money, increasing income reduces popularity, a larger workforce indirectly increases pollution and so forth.

This is where you need to decide if the game is for you or not. It isn't all power-hungry god-like city creation. That's the fun bit - building stuff, laying roads, installing a huge smog-producing power plant. You can't just do that. You need to fiddle with percentages, tweak sliders and, for a large part, do as you're told. Only when you have a good sized city, and you've passed the break-even point can you start doing what you want, rather than what you need to. Gameplay freedom has to be pretty much earned. That isn't to say you won't enjoy it on the way, as you will. You just have to be aware that Things Must Be Done First, and they can take some time. But hey, if you're in the market for a simulation game, you're in for the long haul anyway, right?

Of course this being a review, you want to be told whether or not you should be buying it, don't you? The definitive answer is... maybe. If you have Sim City 3000, then you probably shouldn't bother. There isn't all that much new for you here. If you have an older version, and you enjoyed it, then yes - you need to own Sim City 4. The improvements over the fiddlyness of SC2000 are quite apparent, and graphically it's a huge step forward. If you haven't played a Sim City game before, and you liked Civilisation, Populous, or even Championship Manager, then you'll almost certainly warm to Sim City 4. If you are a The Sims owner, then although the humour and stylisation of The Sims is here, just don't expect it to be the same game on a bigger scale. Remember - Sim City is the daddy. And the granddaddy. And the great granddaddy.

4/5





90 Minutes

Some people are on the pitch! They think it's all over! **Mike Jenkins** wishes it bloody was!

I love football games. It certainly was very thoughtful of the people who dreamed up the sport to make it so splendidly suited to being recreated in video game form hundreds of years later, and I salute their long dead selves for this. The essential simplicity of the sport means it just feels at home on the screen, and unlike sports such as American Football you don't need to be an obsessive fan or read novel-sized instruction manuals to pick up the controller and get on with the business of swelling onion bags.

Being such a fan of football games, I have played most of them, from Soccer on the Atari VCS, through Match Day, FIFA and ISS. Despite being such a simple sport, it is unfortunately very simple to get the digital representation so wrong that you just end up with an irritating mess in shorts. Very few football games manage to get the point of the game - it's fun. Even games such as the 5-a-side Match Day, which resemble real football about as closely as a man with a trombone, managed to get this - it was fun to play. Simulation obsessed games tend to suffer from their attempts at accuracy and end up being a chore. So it is my opinion that in the perfect football game, a

balance needs to be struck between arcadey fun and accuracy (the Major A ISS games manage this very well).

One such game that appears to go for this approach is 90 Minutes. The Dreamcast is famous as a console that has No Good Football Games, however as this one was released very late on in its life it tends to get overlooked. It was in development by Smilebit (Jet Set Radio, Gun Valkyrie) for a very long time, and football deprived DC owners were holding out high hopes for it. Unfortunately it became somewhat delayed along the way, and by the time it was released everyone was selling their poor DCs as fast as possible, hence its relatively unknown status.

90 Minutes is packed with lots of longevity-extending goodies, such as club league competitions (with real player names no less), world championships etc etc. With a normal English League domestic season lasting 38 games, you won't run out of things to do for a long time. The menu system that greets you upon start-up is easily navigable and nothing like the hideous monstrosity of the recent FIFA games, so it is

Review

mercifully easy to get straight into the action. You can tweak formations and strategies to a commendable extent, so in this respect 90 Minutes succeeds where a lot of other games completely miss the mark.

Having selected your formation and turned off the naturally appalling commentary (Richard Keys apparently talking through bean tins and some string down a very poor telephone line) you can get into the game proper. A nice fly by of the pretty stadium and impressively animated crowd swoops past, players take their positions, nice default camera position lets you see just enough of the pitch. We kick off.

Oh dear.

The first things that will hit you about the football in 90 Minutes are the largely unresponsive controls. You have to use the analogue stick, which can when properly implemented give more precise control, but in this game you have strict 8-way movement so the D-pad would have done just as well. This coupled with the much more serious fact that your players take a few tenths of a second to actually do what you tell them to do basically kills the game stone dead from the start.



Just in case the controls didn't do a good enough job, we have several other glaring and obviously fixable flaws that come back and smash 90 Minutes in the face with a shovel until it croaks. The DC makes an attempt to automatically switch between players depending on where the ball is at the time, but unfortunately at seemingly random intervals, so you will regularly need to revert to the Manual Player Change button, which is completely useless in a goalmouth scramble situation. When charging out with a defender against an oncoming enemy forward, your man will frequently run straight past him and ignore your frenzied attempts to turn round and tackle, leaving enemy forward to hammer the ball past the laughably inept goalkeeper.



Any kind of clever dribbling, already dealt a hefty blow by the semaphore style controls, is completely ruled out by the way that the game insists on playing full animation for every twist you make - you dodge to the left, player goes through lengthy ball-nudge animation before actually doing what he was told, normally doing so just after he runs the ball out of touch. Quick passing is similarly crippled; the players receive the ball, *trap the ball with their feet*, switch feet, then pass, by which time you will have finished redecorating your house or whatever else you had taken up after becoming utterly fed up with this kind of crap.

You also don't appear to be able to shoot the ball first time, which means any crosses, rebounds etc might as well just go out for a goal kick. Ditto long through balls. When receiving a pass, your men will run a few feet back the direction the ball came from before turning (with lengthy animation sequence, natch) and going the right way. Oh, and the speed of the game lurches from correct to hopelessly bogged down, again at seemingly random intervals.

Of course, most of these games normally have positive features, and here they are. The graphics are quite pretty but not anything to write home about. As mentioned before, there are a lot of competitions and cups to take part in, which would be great if the game was actually any good. And that's it for the "it's not all bad" bit.

90 Minutes promised a lot but is utter rubbish. Its nice points have no chance of rescuing anything from the shambolic gameplay. If you have a DC and want a good footy game, spend 20 quid on an N64 and a copy of ISS 98 and forget all about 90 Minutes.



F-Zero X

The red car and the blue car had a race. **Russell Marks** was driving the one which lost. Tch, eh?

F-Zero on the SNES was a classic sci-fi racer. But in 1998, the N64 sequel was released some time after another classic, Wipeout 2097. Both would be hard acts to follow.

One look at F-Zero X in action, however, and you know it's something special. There's no other way to describe a game where you're one of 30 racers (!), and the races are often violent battles with destruction as important as speed - but the game has a bold cartoony look, and comic-strip-style characters.

As if that wasn't enough to differentiate from the Wipeout games, the tracks get pretty wild. Some are fairly flat and straightforward, true, but others have you spiralling all over the place, looping back on yourself, racing upside-down on the outside of tubes, or desperately holding the joystick up to avoid flying out of control as the track lurches down dramatically in front of you.

As well as speed-up arrows littered around the tracks, after the first lap you get the option of additional boost which - in a change from the original - saps your energy reserves. Since there are no weapons available other than your own vehicle, and the various ramming moves also tend to end up costing you energy, racing well without blowing up can sometimes be a bit of a challenge.

The difficulty curve is well-balanced though, with one

exception - the Novice level. It's stupidly easy. Standard level is more reasonable, and Expert is where things really start getting interesting; if you're not leaving a trail of destruction behind you at that stage, you probably won't win the cup. The most determined players should try to beat the Master level, which makes even Expert look easy.

The problems with the game are fairly minor. The high framerate must come at the cost of track-side detail, which is rather lacking, and the textures look a bit garish and crude. In the inevitable four-player mode, you only get four vehicles on the track, which is a let-down after having so many in the main single-player game. And the mostly-rock soundtrack will undoubtedly put some people off, though personally I quite liked it.

With manic races, hard-fought battles, roller-coaster tracks, ridiculous speed, and nice unlockable extras, F-Zero X is hard to fault. A sequel which betters the original in almost every way, and a great game in its own right.

5/5

ugvm

Gold Award





Animal Crossing

Spying a rabbit in his headlights, **OJLim** slams it up a gear and floors it.

"So much do to! Plant trees, pull weeds, go shopping, run errands - or just go fishing." proclaims the back of the box. Jeez, I don't even want to do this stuff in real life. This sounds like the worst game ever. Only Nintendo would try to make paying off your mortgage cute and fun. So what's the fuss about?

The premise of Animal Crossing is that you move into a new town (which you name) and start a new life there. In fact, that's the whole game summed up right there, because there's no plot and no goal in



Animal Crossing. Early on in the game, you are guided and asked to perform several tasks. Because you come to Animal Crossing with no money, the local shopkeeper, Tom Nook gives you a place to live on the condition that you pay the mortgage back to him eventually. 'Eventually' meaning whenever the hell you want.

Because in Animal Crossing, you can do whatever the hell you want. Talk to people living in your village, offer to do errands for them, or decline if you don't feel like it. Plant some trees, or chop them all down if you want. Hey, maybe you want to plant some more orange trees. Decorate your house, design a t-shirt, try to furnish your house to your complete satisfaction, you're free to do what you want to do.

It still sounds incredibly dull, doesn't it? However, every good game has a hook. The hook in Animal Crossing has to do with time - specifically, the game is in real-time. Really real-time. Turn on the game at 9am and it's 9am in your town and everyone will greet you good morning. Turn up in the middle of the night, and most people will be asleep. Play the game in the winter and your town will be covered in snow. Likewise, in the summer the grass is green and the town is sunny. This is all achieved by the Gamecube's internal clock, which you may recall setting when you first plugged in your Gamecube.

Nintendo use the real-time effect superbly through events that can only occur at specific times. For example, you can only visit your local store between

9am and 10pm. You may find out that someone might be coming into town next Friday at 6pm. It is the events and the sense of something that might happen that will continually draw you back to the game. Chances are, you'll never witness all the things that can happen in Animal Crossing.

Not content with using one pretty-innovative hook, Nintendo threw in another one in that they've hidden lots of NES games for you to play. Starting the game, you'll receive two games as a gift (to my horror, I received Donkey Kong Jr Math and Golf) after which you'll have to find other ways to get the others. Games like Donkey Kong, Excitebike and Balloon Fight await discovery and those who grew up in the 8-bit era will enjoy the nostalgia as well as seeing which games aged better than others. Nintendo even had the foresight to implement two-player modes so you can play with friends. Even better, unlike a lot classic game compilations, high scores are saved to the memory card, so playing Pinball for hours isn't all in vain. Additionally, Nintendo occasionally release codes through their excellent official Animal Crossing website to unlock new games. Locked somewhere in the game are classics such as Super Mario Brothers, Punch Out and Zelda which, presumably at some point, Nintendo intend on releasing the codes to unlock these games too. Playing NES games can be a strange experience, especially after exiting and realising you're still playing Animal Crossing. Post-modern indeed.

Graphically, the game definitely has the cute look down pat, but that's about it. The game is an update of an N64 game that didn't even push that console's graphical prowess. None of this matters though; you'll forget about the rubbish graphics after walking around town when the sun sets and an orange glow covers your town. Again, Nintendo really milk the real-time element and impress you graphically through the clock, rather than anything you can appreciate immediately.

On the other hand, sound is an area where Animal



Crossing immediately excels. From the infectious lite-jazz opening theme to the music changes every hour of the day, the music is subtle but effective. You even get to write your town's theme tune, which then is subtly adapted to the town clock that chimes every hour. And then there's the musical genius of K.K. Slider (a singing dog) to discover...

Animal Crossing has been dubbed as a 'communication game' by Nintendo. Now, since Nintendo completely made up this category for Animal Crossing, a little explanation may be required. Communication isn't just a reference to the need to talk to the animals in your town, but more to do with the fact that Animal Crossing is the ultimate Gamecube connectivity game. You'll be able to visit other people's towns simply by slotting your friend's memory card in Slot B and converse and shop there. With a Game Boy Advance and a GC-GBA link cable, you'll be able to visit an exclusive GBA island with various secrets to discover. You can also download NES games you've discovered and play them on your Game Boy - a feature that is executed perfectly. Those with too much money to spare can also shell out for an E-Reader for the GBA. Four series of Animal Crossing related cards are being released and they will unlock extra music, designs, clothes and furniture for those truly in love with the game.

One last nice feature Nintendo have incorporated is the ability to trade items with anyone in the world using a very clever code-encryption method. It's a genius addition (if sometimes a bit unwieldy) and has spawned countless forums on the internet with people trading items with each other.

It's hard to explain what's so compelling about Animal Crossing to someone who's never played it. Much of the joy in Animal Crossing is the fun of discovery and the thought that something new can be discovered each day. A lot of thought, care, and effort has been put into the game. If you're a lover of detail, then you'll adore Animal Crossing.

Having said that, Animal Crossing isn't everyone's cup of tea. Those looking for GTA or Halo realism or simply put off by Nintendo's perpetuated kiddie image may as well not bother. This is Nintendo Cute with a capital C. Others may just find the game tedious. You might find the errands and the day-to-day nature of the game extremely dull. You may scream at the lack of direction, the lack of a plot, and the lack of an ending. You may not like this game because it's just so goddamn tranquil. Since Animal Crossing never forces you to do anything, playing it is always a peaceful and relaxing experience. It's the video gaming equivalent of My Neighbour Totoro.

However, if you are bitten by the Animal Crossing bug, it will consume your life. You'll know you're bitten when the highlights of your day become the things that happened in your town. You'll intend to go into your town for 15 minutes and suddenly it's an hour and a half later. And you can't wait for 8pm on Saturday to come around. You'll play the game every day for ages and even when you've finally tired of it, you'll look back and realise you've played it far more than any other game. Now that's value for money.



Animal Crossing is by no means a perfect game (no online support, no keyboard support, occasionally clunky interface, non-movable camera, no simultaneous multiplayer, limited AI, long repetitive journeys between towns) but overall it's such a charming game that you forgive it for its failings. Nintendo may not have as packed a game release schedule like Sony or Microsoft, but who needs other games when you have ones like this?

5/5

ugvm

Gold Award



Mystery Bonus

deKay holds his cherries...

There is one thing that has always bothered me about games like this. What is the point? You can't actually *really* win money from them, can you? Having said that, you don't have to supply it with loads of ten pees either.

I do like fruit machine games, especially Fruit Machine Simulator on the Spectrum. They are fun to play, even if you don't get any actual money for three BARs. This one is pretty good too. Japanese in style, and so a little different from the usual kind we're used to, Mystery Bonus actually has five winning lines, not just the one. You can bet on these lines too - placing up to 2 credits on each one - which potentially doubles your earnings, but halves your losses.

Once you get a win (which nine times out of ten will be a single cherry), you can play one of two card subgames. One is a Play Your Cards Right 'higher or lower' game, and the other is simply 'bigger or smaller than a 7'. Both operate as more or less Double or Nothing, although you get *loads* of money for 5 correct guesses in a row. Besides these games, there is also the Mystery Bonus (random winning amount for three ?s) and the Coin Bonus (when you get three coins five times). Unfortunately, that's it. I was hoping for more games, and the more usual Skill Stop type winnings multiplier. Not a bad game, but not what it could have been, sadly.

2/5



Confidential Mission

Gun games are a bittersweet experience. It's fun to blast away at stuff with a glorified lightpen, but less fun to stump up the cash only to quickly get bored of the one game you've got for it. As such, Confidential Mission was clearly aimed at Dreamcast lightgun owners who'd tired of House of the Dead 2.

The graphics and music are good, if a touch generic at times. Most of the gameplay will immediately be familiar to those who've seen the Virtua Cop games - target displays look the same, it has bonuses for justice shots (hit the right arm) and combo shots (hit three times), and well, it's just generally an unofficial Virtua Cop 3 but with a light-hearted Bond-parody theme. Occasional minigames give a change of pace without disrupting things too much, and your success or failure allows for some (minimal) branching of the path you take.

The main problem with the game is how short it is; there are only three levels. It seems the designers were all too aware of this shortcoming, so while the



Our intrepid reviewer unholsters his Sega lightgun, and tests out his **Russell Marksmanship**...

first and second levels are generally enjoyable, the third sees a sudden, dramatic rise in difficulty which unbalances the game alarmingly. Combine that with an ill-advised continue-resistant 'get it right first time or you lose' minigame at the end, and it's clear that this is a faithful conversion of a slightly cynical arcade credit-muncher.

As with House of the Dead 2, the conversion doesn't just feature the arcade mode. The main additions are a training mode with various exercises designed to improve your skills - a mixed bag, some can get very annoying but most are good - and (if you can unlock it) "Another World", a rearranged, harder version of the main game.

Ironically enough, that harder mode is really what 'saves' the game. True, there are more enemies and it's more difficult overall, but the difficulty curve is much more sensible - it has the balance the main game lacks. It's just unfortunate that you have to (as well as winning the normal mode) do the first 18 missions in the training mode to unlock it, which isn't easy by any means.

So if you're willing to put in the effort to unlock the harder mode, it's a decent gun game which is worth having. But if you won't or can't, you'll be disappointed.

3/5



Winning Eleven Final Evolution

OJLim plays a bit of the old Jumpers-For-Goalposts game, causing great distress to his mates when he uses his shorts and pants for corner flags...

FIFA vs ISS/PES. EA vs Konami. It's been a long-running debate, and both games have a legion of die-hard followers. Everyone's entitled to their own opinion of which they prefer, but there's no denying that Konami make a more realistic simulation of football than EA. Konami's endless gameplay tweaking since the SNES years has paid off magnificently for them, as even the casual gamer will now concede that the Pro Evolution Soccer series plays a meaner game of football than EA's style-over-substance approach.

Another regular complaint against EA is their insistence of releasing several games a year. Particularly when the World Cup comes around, EA will release the same game twice - one being a World Cup edition which lops off all the options except said-competition, adds shinier-looking graphics and plasters a new name on the cover. Now, you'd never catch Konami stooping so low, would you? Konami would never release three or four football games in a year, would they?

Allow me to transport you to country known as Japan. Over there, Konami are the new EA Sports. In 2002 alone, Konami saw fit to release Winning Eleven 6 (known to Europe as Pro Evolution Soccer 2), Jikkyou World Soccer 2002 (aka ISS2), Winning Eleven 6: J-League, and Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution. Ever

get the feeling you're being ripped off? Of course, nobody really complained that much, because who would complain about Konami releasing more football games? Tsk, double-standards, I tell you.

Perhaps there's not much point in telling you that Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution is the best football game on the market, because it wins this accolade by default. The accolade was previously held by Winning Eleven 6, and by being an update Final Evolution takes its place. The Winning Eleven series has no competition, though EA are slogging in the coding rooms to catch up.



WE6:FE isn't wildly different from its predecessor. Konami can largely get away with releasing this game by the fact that it shares the same generation-number (that would be the '6' in the title) as the game that preceded it. It's still Winning Eleven 6, but better.

Most of the changes are aesthetic (look, it's Beckham's haircut from last month! Ronaldinho has big buck teeth!! There are player names on the back of the shirts!!!) although, to be fair, these are the type of complaints that have been levelled at Konami in the past. It's still not as pretty as FIFA, but it's getting there. The player animations, on the other hand, are lovely. Players tussle for the ball almost too convincingly, goalkeepers react to the ball the way you expect to react in real life, and Ronaldo wags his



finger when he scores a goal. Squad rosters are also updated so that everyone is in the right place. There's even an online squad-update mode (only works in Japan though).

Konami have also included some minor gameplay improvements and bug fixes from Winning Eleven 6 (and sadly, it would seem, from Pro Evolution Soccer 2, which was only released two weeks earlier). Ball physics are improved, collision detection is excellent (watch your player grind to a halt as he dribbles into an opponent) and best of all, Konami have greatly reduced the amount of the infamous player-waiting-for-the-ball syndrome that plagues their games. But not completely. Seeing as they are the new EA, I expect they'll get it right in five years.

More importantly, however, Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution marks the first time the series is appearing on another console. Konami are bringing wonderful football goodness back to Nintendo, as this game has just been released on the Gamecube, boasting 30% more animation and slightly tighter gameplay. It's all sounding rather EA.... Don't hold your breath for a European release though; Sony still hold the exclusive rights to Konami's football gem in Europe. However, anything's possible - there's probably a pretty good chance for Pro Evolution Soccer 3. Where there's money to be made...

4/5

ugvm
Silver Award


Pocket PC

Review

Pocket Pop

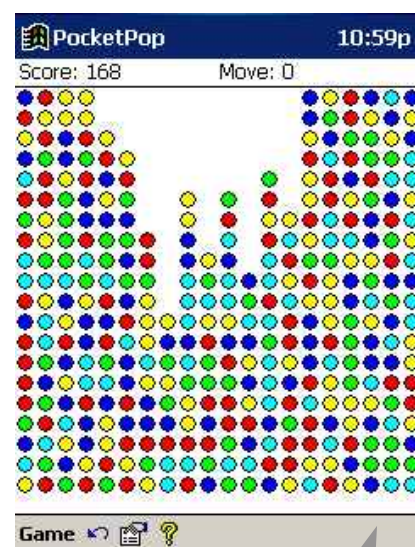
Tim Miller bursts his balls and feels no pain...

The simple ideas are the best, they say, and nowhere is that more true than with puzzle games. All the most successful games (e.g., Tetris and Columns) have one very basic concept behind them.

Pocket Pop has an even more simple idea. There's no incessant movement, no need to think in 5 seconds. You're presented with a static playing field, and you must make balls disappear by tapping on a group of two or more of the same colour. If you end up with, say, one blue one stuck in the corner alone, you'll have to try to work out some way of getting another blue ball down to meet it.

To be honest, that's not a great explanation of how the game works, but without playing it, it's virtually impossible to comprehend. You must understand all the interactions between balls, how they'll move if the group underneath them disappears, how the columns will shift together. The fact that there's no time limit only adds to the tension, oddly, since you have more opportunity to worry about what would be the right move.

It works very well on the Pocket PC, and will keep you occupied for a very long time. Most notable of all, though, is the price. It's free. Get it now.



4/5

ugvm
Silver Award


Rogue Leader

Tim Miller feels that the force is strong in this one. And other such clichés.

As a young boy, I remember running into an arcade in Hastings and badgering my parents to let me have a go on a wireframe shooting game. There was nothing remarkable about the game - you flew along and tried to shoot the bad guys. But there was one marvellous bit ... as you approached the end of a trench, you were told: "Use the force". The game, of course, was Star Wars.

Now, the films may be a little short on plot and characterisation, but for those who grew up with Luke, Hans and Leia, there's little that can match the sheer thrill of the Death Star trench run. Little surprise, then, that Factor 5 have based the first mission of their game around it. Fly an X-wing over the surface of the Death Star and take out the gun turrets, and then the TIE fighters. Then down the trench, avoiding Vader's fire ...



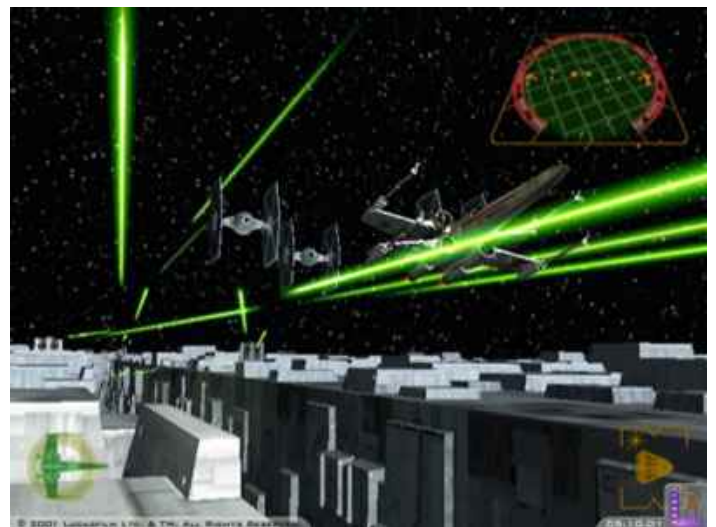
You'd better like this first level, because it's unlikely that you'll see much past it. This is a hard game - not 'Shadow of the Beast hard', but certainly no walk in the park. While it may be an accurate representation of the difficulties a small band of freedom fighters (or, as we now call them, terrorists) would face when confronting a large evil power, it makes the game rather frustrating. Being shot down by a single TIE fighter when you're about to finish off a Star Destroyer... just don't use a new controller.

The excessive difficulty is a shame, really, since such a lot of care has gone into the rest of the game. It looks absolutely astounding, surpassing the original films' effects in some cases. The sound is also of a



very high quality - using Pro-Logic 2 means that you can be better immersed in the game ... we'll ignore the fact that sound wouldn't travel in space. Presentation is also highly impressive, with clips from the films playing in the background of the menus.

And, despite being so difficult to progress, the game is pretty fun to play. The controls are daunting at first, but feel natural in no time at all. The game may have benefited from the two extra buttons of the Xbox pad, but the analogue-click of the shoulder buttons is used to good effect. The sensitivity of the steering is set just right.



It's a marvellous game, spoilt only by the difficulty level. You'll master it eventually, but it'll take a fair while. Use your patience, Luke.

4/5

ugvm

Silver Award



.hack//Infection

Paul Tomlin, fearing his wound may become contaminated, takes the red pill...

.hack//Infection (hereafter .hack) is not at all an easy game to review. Even at the most basic level its an odd concept - it's a Phantasy Star Online clone without the Online bit of the title. Then there is the fact that Bandai chose to release the game as four sequential episodes (//Infection being the first), meaning the game ends in a fashion many times worse than the original Shenmue. And then there are the arguments over the length.

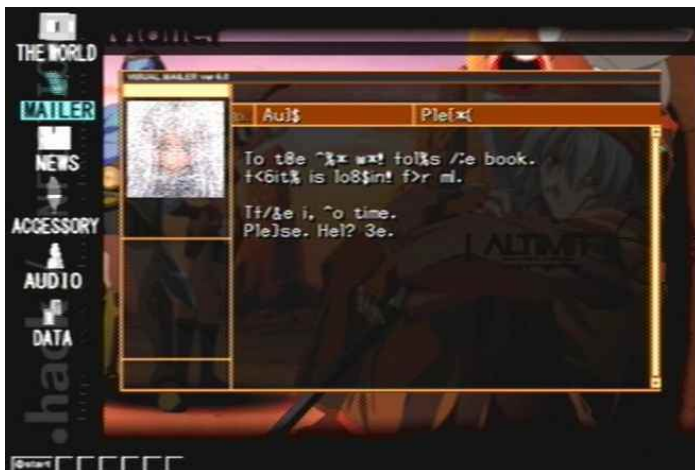
Your role in the series is that of a fourteen year-old Japanese schoolboy playing an online video game, having been invited to join in a bit of questing by his best mate and online-gaming legend Orca. As is typical with this kind of thing, unpredicted events transpire leading to the appearance of a mysterious girl in white and an odd, seemingly invincible monster

which puts the real-life Orca into a coma. This basically sets the stage for a wild goose chase around the online world looking for the nasty responsible, aided by various weird and wacky allies you meet whilst playing.

The game itself takes a form relatively familiar to anyone who has played the likes of Phantasy Star Online. You start in a lobby area, which in the case of .hack are represented by towns with shops and the like, and from there you can form parties and go out questing by use of the Chaos Gate situated at the towns entrance. The Chaos Gate allows you to select three keywords, one from three different lists, and generates a somewhat random Field and dungeon based on this. The aim of the dungeon areas is to get to a room at the bottom containing a "Gott Statue" - a special treasure chest typically containing some piece of desirable equipment.

Progression through the games plot for the most part takes place either through meetings with characters in the games lobby area, or through e-mail and bulletin board posts available through the operating system screens available by logging out of the game. These usually amount to "go to this field here and meet this person", and upon completion you'll be rewarded with a tantalising glimpse of further plot developments.

First impressions of the game are a little varied. Visually, it's a mixed bag, with the character models



Review

looking attractive and well designed, and the central hub areas looking fantastic, whilst the actual field areas are fairly mundane and non-descript. Combat initially seems somewhat mediocre - simply a case of running to the nearest bad guy and hammering the attack button. The controls don't endear themselves to you too quickly either - the camera is fully manual, meaning you have to constantly adjust it in order to keep monsters in your view. There are no shortcuts for special attacks and magic either, so you have to use the menu options every time you wish to perform one.

After the initial negativity, the odd thing about .hack will strike you - that its horribly compulsive. The combat soon becomes second nature, with the menu based attacks becoming quick to pull off. You'll soon be bellowing commands to your fellow party members to adjust to the flow of the battle (although the AI controlling your allies proves to be very competent). You'll also start to play with the Data Drain command, a special attack where your character will rewrite a monster into a weaker form, often obtaining some nice equipment in the process. As in PSO the desire to outfit your character in the most spangly kit available is overwhelming, coupled with the fast, pacy and enjoyable battles and random dungeons leads to the urge to play through just that one more dungeon in case something new turns up.

Whilst simplistic (certainly, it lacks the frequent and long cinema sequences of the likes of Final Fantasy X or Xenosaga, being more short and to the point) the story is refreshingly different to the normal RPG fare, and quickly becomes engrossing. Adding the this, the game is shipped with a forty-five minute anime DVD set in the real world around the same time as the game, and adds a lot to the whole experience. The characters are entertaining and will keep you wondering what they are actually like outside of the game world.

Where Bandai score a real plus-point here is in the quality of the presentation. As well as using them to forward the plot, the BBS and e-mail systems are



used to cleverly deliver playing tips and tutorial information. The characters who you frequently quest with and butter up with nice gear send you e-mails talking about themselves, from the mundane to the downright bizarre. You can also unlock different backgrounds and music for use on the OS screens. Even better than all that, there is a selectable language track, meaning you can play either with English or Japanese voice overs. There are a whole host of little things like this which just serves to make the whole game experience so much richer.

Ultimately, though, the whole experience may be over just a little too quickly for some. The game can take anywhere between 10 and 25 hours to play through depending on how you tackle it (this reviewer fell very much into the higher end of the scale), and whilst this compares favourably to the likes of the Metal Gear Solid and Resident Evil series, the fact that there are three games to follow leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of those accustomed to the somewhat slow and bloated nature of many turn based RPG games.

Personally I believe the game represents an adequate amount of gaming for the entrance fee, and whilst the maximum practical experience level for the game is likely to be reached before the end of the plot you can still play your game complete save in order to attain better equipment to port into the forthcoming //Mutation, unlock more OS tat, or even just for fun.

Returning to the original point, .hack is a very difficult game to review. It's a quirky game, perhaps even an acquired taste, but those willing to invest the effort will find an addictive, and ultimately enjoyable game with a horrid ending. Roll on .hack//Mutation!

4/5

ugvm
Silver Award



Starfox Adventures

Can Fox McCloud triumph again? **John Abbitt** tags along to find out.

This is the third game to star the heroic star pilot, Fox McCloud. The first was the classic Super Nintendo space shooter *Starfox* (Starwing in Europe) which was followed up on the Nintendo64 with the imaginatively entitled *Starfox 64* (or in Europe, *Lylat Wars*). Finally, Rare's first and last game for the Nintendo Gamecube, *Starfox Adventures*.

While flying around the Lylat system, Fox McCloud receives a call from Sgt. Pepper. Apparently strange

things are happening in the far reaches of the Lylat system, an army of evil dinosaurs are causing havoc on Dinosaur Planet. Fox, along with his crew Slippy and Peppy, head off towards to start another mission.

Once Fox arrives on Dinosaur planet, he discovers a race called the SharpClaws along with their leader General Scales, who are not only causing trouble but have removed the magical spell stones which have caused the planet to tear itself apart. This time Fox must solve puzzles, fight the enemy, save the planet and the mysterious girl Krystal.

Now this episode of the *Starfox* series plays differently to the previous entries. Fox is on foot for the majority of this game. There is some Arwing action, but more on that later.

The puzzle element is quite basic, even annoyingly so at times, and will probably be too easy for the hardened gamer. Most of time is spent travelling around collecting varied items. The easy interface will let you know if you have the right object or not, so you won't have to try every object in your inventory to solve the puzzle. Most of the objects needed to



Review

solve the puzzle are located within the current location. You cannot abandon one puzzle and try another, the game is has very linear game play.

Fox's only weapon in the game is a magical staff he picks up at the very beginning. Initially this staff can do nothing but as the game progresses, you'll be lead to special areas where the staff can be upgraded. Such upgrades include the ability to shoot balls of flame, create earthquakes and the ability to open magic portals. The staff itself is powered by collecting crystals that grow all over the planet. So don't panic, because if there's a puzzle involving magical abilities, you can always find a crystal growing nearby. So worrying about a shortage of magical power is never a factor.

Of course its not all puzzles, Fox frequently has to battle with the SharpClaws as well. But again this is easy and not much more than repeated button bashing. Fox auto targets the closest enemy and then you just keep pressing the A button until they die, watching Fox perform some elaborate moves that you have no control over. The soldiers only attack one at a time, so even in a large battle there's no real danger.

Several times in the game Fox will have to fly off to one of planet segments and this is where the Arwing segments come in. Each section is very similar, with you having to fly through asteroids, mines, enemy fighters and gold rings. Unfortunately these are very short, only lasting a minute or two if that. As long as you have full health, they're not much of a challenge either. It's a shame because these are the only sections were adrenalin and quick reactions come to play and they help to break up the puzzle solving.

Graphically, Rare have done a grand job on this game. The main characters are all very well animated and Fox even has fur which you can see move in the breeze. Fox, along with the SharpClaws and other strange inhabitants of the planet, are all nicely animated.



The landscapes are just as eye pleasing. Using a similar technique seen in Super Mario Sunshine, there's no pop-up and the far landscape is blurred, an effect that works well. The Arwing sections are also very nicely done and move at a fair old pace. No frame rate issues in this game and its worth noting that the 60Hz and widescreen options are present.

Unfortunately great graphics do not make a great game. Collecting items and solving puzzles can soon become tiresome, especially when there's no shortcut between locations (i.e. lots and lots of running). Even though the playing area is vast, the game play is very linear. Go here, solve the puzzles, collect the Spellstone / Krazoa spirit, return to temple and start again. Unfortunately there's not even any subplot to break the game up a little. Come to think of it, there's hardly any plot at all. Collecting the Spellstones and spirits is all the games about.

Overall, it's an average game but considering how long it's been in development, I'm sure it could've been better.

3/5





Gauntlet: Dark Legacy

OJLim needs food, badly...

Sometimes, mail comes through your door addressed to someone not living in your house. Sometimes, one turns out to be a package. Sometimes, your flatmate opens that package and throws a PS2 game in your general direction.

Welcome to the world of Gauntlet Dark Legacy (ah, if only it had been Rez or Parappa The Rapper), Midway's update of the Atari classic that I enjoyed playing so much in my youth. But boy did Midway screw it up.

The joy of the original Gauntlet was the speed at which you could rush through levels. Some levels you could finish within seconds if you knew the right wall to shoot or knew the appropriate path. Gauntlet was quite the zippy little game.

Midway have attempted to bring Gauntlet into the present by making it 3D and giving it a somewhat darker look. Never mind that even the PS1 could reproduce these graphics; by trying to retain the

classic Gauntlet gameplay within this 3D world, Midway has totally bugged up the balance of the game. Because there's no map system, it's pretty easy to get lost in Gauntlet. This was okay in the original, because you could quickly backtrack to where you were before in about 5 seconds. Due to all characters here moving at snail pace, this just becomes a tedious process in this game. Additionally, 3D Gauntlet reveals deficiencies in the game that you forgave in the original. Like the repetitive nature of the game. Or the fact that you can't climb over the not-particularly-high walls. In fact, the whole game comes off like a mediocre Golden Axe. Midway have attempted to make the game more like an RPG by adding levelling up through experience. But since you're permanently fighting in Gauntlet rather than exploring like you would in an RPG, the whole idea feels tacked on.

Not to mention Death isn't even scary in this game. Imagine that, Death was *more frightening* as teeny-little 2D sprite (admittedly, due to the excruciating sound he made when he touched you, but still) than in magnificent 3D.



1/5

Computer Consolation

deKay pares down some 8-bit computers in the hope of unleashing the raw gaming power hidden within...

These days, it isn't all that difficult to find a games console that you can use (at least to some extent), as a computer. The PS2 has a keyboard, mouse and variant of Linux available for it. The Dreamcast has a mouse, keyboard and flavour of BSD, and could be used to access the internet with Sega's own browser software. The Xbox has a hard drive, and can be modified to run Linux too.

But what about the other way around? Turning a computer into a games console? Can you do away with the computery gubbins from a Mac or PC, and have a plug-in-a-game style console? Well, yes. But what if you didn't have to?

This feature is the first of a two part look at computers that became games consoles, starting with 8-bit machines.

In the late 1980s and early 90s, video games had really taken off. In the US, the NES was king, and it was reported that eventually 1 in 4 US households had one. Although not quite as popular in the UK, the NES (and the Master System) had gradually stolen a chunk of the

more traditional *computer* games market. Why buy a C64 and have to bother loading games, when you could buy a NES and just plug them in? The games may have been more expensive, but the initial console cost was lower and the games were, at the time, (almost) arcade quality. I'm sure Super Mario Bros had a hand in selling the machines too. Besides, it was so much easier, and who wanted to program in BASIC anyway?

Seeing this new wave, the home computer manufacturers Commodore and Amstrad decided to fight back. They created their own games consoles, alarmingly quickly. Development costs of these machines was virtually nil, as they already had the technology. Basically, they hacked the keyboard off their existing 8-bit home computers and stuck a cartridge port on there. Voila - instant games console.

Commodore chose the C64 to become their new console, bravely deciding not to cover up its true hardware by calling it the C64GS. It looked not unlike a white Master System (the original Master

System, that is). Amstrad converted their CPC464 machine, creating a futuristic-looking white console called the GX4000. You'd never guess it used to be a computer at all to look at it.

Of course, a new console needs range of games to go with it. Both the C64 and the CPC had a huge back catalogue of games already, but they were on cassette or disk. There were previously a few C64 cartridges (since most models of C64 had cartridge ports), but nowhere near as many as there were disks and tapes. By the time the C64GS was released, much of the C64 cartridge back-catalogue had been deleted anyway, and the CPC+ had very few cartridges at all. Plus there was the problem of existing cartridge games requiring use of a keyboard - obviously missing from the GS and GX...

In fact, converting existing games, and new games, over to cartridge format was largely child's play. Since the C64GS and GX4000 were pretty much identical to their keyboard-endowed brethren, the code would be largely unaltered. The problem was convincing



Burnin' Rubber (GX4000)

The most popular GX4000 game, mainly due to it coming free with every console...



Batman: The Caped Crusader

One of the better C64GS cartridges. As with all the others though, just the same as the C64 version.

software houses to actually go ahead and do it. They already had a nice little earner with the cheap to produce tapes and disks. Some software houses were involved with making Nintendo or Sega games anyhow. Why diversify? It'd cost them money, and would require taking a risk on these consoles taking off - something unlikely with the NES and Master System already having a stranglehold on the market, and 8-bit technology becoming old-hat very quickly.

As a result, most companies didn't bother. Many retailers failed to stock the machines too - they already had plenty of space taken up with other consoles, and certainly didn't need these hybrids taking up more of it. So how is a machine that retailers won't sell,

and games makers won't support, going to sell? The answer: badly.

Within a year it was clear nobody wanted them. Within two it was car-boot fodder. Neither machine had a particularly large range of titles (the GX4000 having even fewer than the GS), and very few of those games were outstanding. Perhaps if they'd been there before Nintendo's steamroller NES, they might have stood a chance.

Next Issue

In **ugvm05** we'll take a look at some of the slightly more recent of the computer-to-console failures, including the Amiga CD32.

More Info

See these websites for more information on the C64GS and the GX4000 consoles:

www.jhayler.freemove.co.uk
Although seemingly for the Atari 7800, John Hayler has lists of what appears to be all of the C64GS and GX4000 cartridges ever released.

www.lemon64.com/total/story/
The whole C64 range, including the C64GS.

members.tripod.com/faberp/
Many unusual systems, including the GX4000.

CPC

Retro Review

Tubaruba

Tim Miller dons his jetpack and goes back to school. As you do.

Games used to be insanely hard. This point was brought to my attention around ten seconds after I'd loaded Tubaruba on my CPC emulator, and died. I used to be so good at this game - it was a long-running competition between my sister and I to see who could collect the most money. It was always me, of course.

The main character in Tubaruba is a boy, name unknown (although the manual hints he may be called Tubaruba - explaining the game name), who is in school and has to collect money to repair a broken window. Obviously, this explains why he has a personal jetpack, and there are all types of evil flying around trying to kill him. Musical instruments in the music room, birds in the garden, and so on... all seem to want our character to fail.

Control is pretty standard platform-with-jetpack fare. You move around the screen, and shoot anything that gets in the way - and often things that don't get in the way, too. Avoid anything shooting at you. Collect food and drinks, collect money, don't get shot.

It sounds easy, but it's not. The game is incredibly fast-paced, and you'll have a job keeping an eye on



everything at the same time. Avoid the baddies on the floor, on the wall, hiding behind that partition ... avoid their bullets, avoid walking through them, avoid the spikes. The control of the main character certainly doesn't help, since it's rather sluggish to respond to your commands at times. Yet still, when you die, it's your fault, not the machines - and you'll want just one more go.

It's not aged badly. The graphics were bright and colourful when it first came out, and although they're blocky now they're still functional. Sound's great, especially the title tune. They really don't make them like they used to - but that's not necessarily a bad thing. When all's said and done, this is a good game marred by a silly difficulty level.

3/5

31



Dragon's Lair 3D

Daniel Spreadbury risks it all for a girl called Daphne. Then asks himself why he bothered.

Like the eponymous scaly monster at its climax, Dragon's Lair (the arcade game) has attained somewhat mythical status amongst its video game brethren. In a single swoop it encompasses some of the most unfortunate tendencies of the young medium: it used ground-breaking technology for the time (Laserdisc), a huge budget (getting Don Bluth's animation studio to produce all the visuals using traditional cel animation)... and yet still managed to stink up the arcade with some of the most derisory gameplay ever conceived.



All the player had to do was wait until the opportune moment -- a lull in the beautifully animated story unfolding before him -- and then make a couple of furtive tugs on the cabinet's joystick in the hopes that the game's hero, hapless knight Dirk the Daring, would avoid the deadly spikes/collapsing floor/scorching flames/[insert identikit medieval peril here]. More often than not, however, the player would not time his waggles exactly right, and Dirk would be impaled/crushed/incinerated/[insert identikit unpleasant way to die here].

The upshot? An experience that looked fantastic, sounded fantastic, but was so frustrating that it barely qualified as a game at all. Perhaps without Dragon's Lair we would have been spared the horrors of Night Trap and Voyeur... but perhaps it's unfair to heap the blame for all of gaming's "interactive movie" monstrosities on the bungling but determined shoulders of Dirk the Daring.

In any case, fast forward to the tail end of 2002, and Dirk makes his return in Dragon's Lair 3D, aiming to once again rescue the lovely Princess Daphne from the clutches of the evil wizard Mordroc. It's not the





first time that Dirk has appeared on the home computer (there were 16-bit ports of the original *Dragon's Lair* game that spanned so many floppy disks that they threatened to bring on a new ice age by altering the earth's rotation on its axis) but it is the first time the player can "be" Dirk in glorious 3D.

And make no mistake about it, this is a fine looking game. The characters are (of course) cel-shaded, and perfectly capture the spirit and detail of Don Bluth's originals. The cut-scenes are gorgeous, and although the scenery in the game proper doesn't live up to the character models or the cut-scenes (for example, it is not itself cel-shaded, which leads to a peculiar clash of visual styles), the bold, cartoon colours certainly make this a visually appealing experience.

However, the game's developers have seen fit not only to retain the visual style of the original arcade game (a wise move), but also the kind of trial and error puzzles that made it so teeth-gnashingly frustrating (an inexcusably stupid one). For example, pretty much the first puzzle in the game is a square room with three exits and floor that collapses in seconds, crazy-paving style, the moment it is stepped on. There's absolutely no indication given to the player about how to tackle this puzzle; instead, Dirk simply has to blunder in again and again, tumbling predictably to his death the first five or six



times, until the player stumbles upon the solution (which is to head as quickly as possible for the door on the right).

This kind of time-sensitive puzzle is hampered not only by poor game design, but also by the peculiarly cumbersome control system: the action is entirely in a third-person perspective, and the player uses the familiar forward/back/strafe key combinations to manoeuvre Dirk, but also has to keep one hand hovering near the mouse to constantly adjust the over-sensitive camera; this makes negotiating the frequent pixel-perfect jumps hair-tearingly annoying. There are also additional keys for sheathing and unsheathing Dirk's weapon (so to speak), and for the use of magical "essences" that Dirk can pick up along the way.

A quick word about the voice acting, too: it's truly awful. Daphne speaks to Dirk via a magical amulet throughout the game, and I've heard more convincing delivery from a mime. The voice acting is stilted, patronising in tone and grates even the first time you hear one of the poorly-scripted lines. When you've just failed to make it through a hazard for the fifteenth time and you're forced to go back a couple of screens and hear Daphne's simpering - yet strangely incoherent - voice yet again, it's an experience that would threaten the sanity of all but the seriously hearing-impaired.



If you've not found this game so frustrating that you've gone bald, worn your teeth down to stubs and smashed most of the windows in your house by the forcible ejection of one bit or another of your expensive gaming rig by the time you get even halfway through it, you're a more patient man than me. Lurking behind the comfortably lush visuals and amusing cut-scenes of *Dragon's Lair 3D* is a seriously deficient platform game that substitutes lazy trial-and-error-based puzzles for challenges arising out of good game design. It may look good, but one whiff of the gameplay will convince you otherwise in short order. One to avoid.

Hardware Report

Despite being around for a couple of years now, the GamePark32 handheld console seems to have maintained a fairly low profile outside of its native Korea. Though it may look like a Game Boy Advance, it has a very different way of going about its business.

The big difference is that it's an open platform, designed to be connected to your PC via the supplied USB cable. Software can be downloaded from the internet and installed straight to the device, just like a PDA. It also plays MP3 files and even DivX movies. With new software being released on an almost daily basis the future looks very interesting.

Adam Dawes takes a look at what the console has to offer.

Park Life

Hardware

The unit itself measures about 14 x 9cm, and is around 3cm thick. The screen takes up 7 x 5.5cm, which sounds fairly small in comparison to the unit size but is actually a surprisingly good size. The unit is light and fits well in your hand.

The screen has a resolution of 320x240 pixels, exactly half the width and height of a VGA display, and has two colour modes: a paletised 8-bit colour mode and a 16-bit "true colour" mode. The screen itself is unfortunately not backlit, making it hard or impossible to use in poorly lit conditions (a backlit model should be available shortly, however). It excels in good lighting though, and has a crisp, bright and colourful picture.

Proper stereo sound is produced using the two built-in speakers, one to each side of the screen. A standard headphone socket is also available.

The unit is based on a 32-bit ARM RISC processor and is capable of running at up to 133MHz. The speed can be selected by the software. Higher speeds will, of course result in a shorter battery life.

Two AA batteries are used to power the GP32. It has been stated that a pair of batteries will provide power for up to ten hours. My own experience has not been quite so good, but some rechargeable batteries should sort that out satisfactorily. When the batteries do start to get low, most applications start to flicker and then just reset the device without warning, which is rather frustrating.

A reasonable set of control buttons are available. An 8-way joypad provides directional movement; this works fine for shoot-em-up games but can be a bit clumsy for more precise movements. Two action buttons are also available, as well as Start and Select buttons and two "shoulder" buttons on the top of the unit.



Instead of using cartridges, the GP32 stores all its information on Smart Media Cards (SMC). These are available in capacities of up to 128Mb fairly cheaply. Whilst this is an acceptable data size for storing games, it is very limiting when using the device as an MP3 player and so it is a shame that a more expandable storage format was not used instead.





Software

The GP32 sadly does not excel when it comes to commercial software. Such software does exist and can be purchased from the Gamepark web site, but the majority of it appears to be only in Korean. This is a shame as some of it looks very good. Only a handful of commercial titles are available compared to the library of the GBA.

On the other hand, a good selection of emulators are available right now. These cover platforms including the C64, Spectrum, Sega Master System, NES, PC Engine, Game Boy and Game Boy Color, SCUMM (the engine used for Lucasarts' point-and-click adventures, such as the Monkey Island series) and even some arcade emulators. This is currently the area in which the GP32 shines. There is something exceedingly cool about having the C64 BASIC screen in the palm of your hand, or being able to play Day Of The Tentacle on the train without having to lug a lap-top around.



Not all of these emulators are perfect; some are a bit slow, others have poor sound and a few are rather unstable. However, many of them are still in development and are getting better all the time.

There is a sad shortage of non-emulation software written specifically for the GP32. Ports of various titles from other platforms (including Wolfenstein 3D, Heretic, Rick Dangerous and Elite) all exist in various

states of completeness but most of them have a hurried, unfinished feel to them. This is a shame and something that needs to be addressed if the GP32 is to survive as a viable platform.



A built-in MP3 player is a nice bonus feature. It has perfectly good sound quality and paired with some headphones is a great little thing to have in your pocket. The player is not perfect, however, and appears to only like music files recorded at 44.1KHz. Music recorded at any other frequency plays back at the wrong speed.

For programmers interested in this device, a number of software development kits are available for free on the internet. These allow native GP32 applications to be created, which can then be copied to the device and run straight away. Software appears to be granted direct access to the unit's hardware, and this is the reason that such impressive performance can be gained from the device.

Overall this appears to be a very impressive console, let down somewhat by the lack of commercial software. For retro gamers this is definitely worth considering as there are countless hours of 8-bit gaming waiting inside. For more traditional handheld console users the appeal is not so obvious; until the non-emulation software scene takes off more than it has, there's nothing like as much software available as for the GBA.



Seaman Diary (part 5)

This issue, **Rev. Owen Allaway** has mostly been talking to fish creatures. Not that you should be surprised by that fact.

Monday Evening

I check in on the Tadmen. They're cold, but still not hungry. There are still four of them. No one's been eaten while I was at work. After the normal pleasantries one of the Tadmen launches into a speech about how nothing exists until it is perceived. Using his faulty logic (well, he is only a few days old) he decides that he exists because I can perceive him. And then decides that when he turns away from me I will cease to exist as he will no longer be perceiving me. He smiles a smug smile, looks at me for a second and turns away. I do not blink out of existence. The Tadman decides that he needs more time to think and won't talk to me again, except to tell me to go away.



Later that evening I check back in. The Tadmen still do not want to speak to me. It's during my attempts to get them to talk about something that I realise how good the voice recognition is now. Almost all my questions seem to be understood. They also understand, "What's the matter?", for the first time. "If you don't know, I'm not going to tell you." Even "let's talk", which I had a lot of trouble with before, is now being understood. Doesn't help. The Tadmen just tell

me they don't want to talk anymore.

They seem upset about something. If I say sorry, I just got told, "you should be". What have I done wrong? The Tadmen are warm and well fed. (I've never had to feed them, but they've never wanted food when I've asked.) What's going on?

Tuesday Morning

Get up at seven and check in as normal. Leonard tells me I'm doing a good job. It helps ease my mind. Maybe Tadmen are just naturally unpleasant little bastards. They are still not talking to me about much. However, comments like, "Oh, you got up to make me breakfast" and "Where's the coffee?", both dripping with sarcasm, lead me to believe that these chaps are not early risers. Well, sorry, but I can't check on them any later. I have to be gone for work by half seven and I still need to shower. All my questions and apologies and coaxing do no good. And despite the 'breakfast' quote, they are not hungry. After a session twice as long as a normal morning session I have had nothing but insults for my troubles. They wouldn't even say goodbye to me this morning.

The Tadmen have not changed since Sunday. I wonder when the next transformation will occur? And will it be to a friendlier life-form?

Tuesday Evening

Get home and check on the Tadmen. I just have time to notice they now have arms... and then the bloodsucking begins. "I feel dizzy,"

one says as the life is sucked from his body. When two Tadmen are dead and two remain, one of them (one of the live ones) starts to ask me questions about the media. How much TV I watch, whether I prefer going to the cinema or renting films, that sort of thing.

"What's your favourite movie?" he asks. "Brazil" (!)"You're one twisted melon, chum." Wow. I'm impressed that he knew the film and so I tell him. "I'm impressed." (!)"The word is grotesque, pal."



I'm quite amazed. Whenever I think I know all his vocabulary something new pops up. Seaman is impressed by how little TV I watch and how many books I've read in the last year, despite me thinking that I watch too much TV and don't read enough. He obviously has low standards.

After our chat I leave, play a bit of Chrono Cross and watch the long version of Leon for the first time. The short version was ace, but having now seen the long version I decide that's it my second favourite film, behind Brazil. I check on the Tadmen before bed and have the first conversation with Seaman that really, really annoys me. He

assumes that we're somewhere in America, which is true. I tell him we're 'near' Houston. (We're actually in Houston, but that's not an option.) From this Seaman makes the assumption that I'm American. He keeps referring to America as 'my country'. Much as I like America (and I do) it is not 'my country'.



For reasons I cannot explain, his (pretty reasonable) assumption that I'm an American really gets my goat. I've been trying to explain to him that I'm British ever since the first Gillman hatched and I thought now I'd get my chance. But no... The he asks me if I've ever been abroad. He follows this by asking where the last place I went was. I tell him it was "England". He misunderstands my response and starts talking about the Far East. This makes me even more cross. I wait for him to finish his speech, say goodnight and go to bed in a huff.

Wednesday Morning

I'm still in a bit of a mood after last night. I've no idea why the conversation annoyed me so much. It's strange. Anyway, I'm very sleepy this morning and when one of the Tadmen talks about how important it is to have a job you enjoy I only seem to catch half of what he says. I make sure everything's okay, stumble into the shower and go to work. Come in to find our server's playing up and I've got to fix it. Now...

Wednesday Evening

I check in on my Tadmen later in

the evening than usual, although neither they nor Leonard seem to mind. I'm quite shocked by what I find in the tank. The Tadmen's limbs have grown stronger and their bodies have flattened out. Their once proud tails are now tiny things, flicking back and forth in no discernable rhythm. In short, they look like frogs, if you ignore the human face and head-tentacle.

I have a long chat with one Tadman (Frogman?) and as we talk his tail shrinks even more, until it is hardly visible. The Tadman wants to know about my friends and what I like to do when I'm with them. I tell him we go down the pub. He doesn't understand this and asks again. I keep it simple - "Drink beer". This he does understand. He asks me why humans enjoy an activity that destroys their brain-cells. I say it's because it tastes nice. (Not a complete lie, by the way.) In a perfect Homer Simpson voice he responds, "Mmm... rotting grain tastes good." He just doesn't understand.

He also tells me I should take more time to be with my friends. Whether this is out of concern for my well-being, or because he wants rid of me I don't know.

After our chat he swims over to the side of the tank and climbs out. This would have been a bigger moment if (a) I hadn't seen Sushi do the same thing and (b) the other Tadman wasn't already sitting on the side of the pool, obviously having climbed out earlier without me noticing.

One of the little moments that I'm so fond of now occurs - I start talking to the Tadman who's sitting behind the other Tadman, more or less obscured from view. When he replies to me he doesn't just turn round to face me, but he moves around a bit so the other Tadman will not be in the way. In a lesser piece of software he'd have just turned in my direction with no thought for the fact that my view was blocked. I'd like to name one of

the Tadmen, but they both look too similar. I can't tell them apart. I want one to be called 'Baron' and one to be called 'Greenback', but I can't tell which is which. It's a shame, especially after Sushi and Idiot Brother looking so different. Maybe they'll change now their living on land (though they do still like to swim now and again).

Thursday Morning

Really have to drag myself out of bed this morning. I get on the Net and check the news of the new Nintendo console. The controller looks like a horrible third-party bargain basement thing, but I quite like the look of the Gamecube itself. When I finally check in on the



Frogmen (as Leonard calls them) they are cold and, for the first time in ages, hungry. I drop a larva into the tank. One of the Frogmen eats it immediately. The other still complains about being hungry. I drop another larva into the tank. The hungry Frogman is still complaining. I tap on the glass near the larva and he turns around and spies his food. He wanders over to it and flicks out his tongue to catch it. Nice. One of the Frogmen comes over and tells me he appears crabby in the morning because I check in so early during the week. It's not quite an apology for their appalling morning attitudes, but I think it's as close as I'm going to get. Before he can ruin the moment I say goodbye and leave.

More next issue!

My Top 5...



5 Full Throttle (1995)

Yes I finished it in under three hours. So what? Definitely three of the finest hours of gaming I've ever spent. If only Lucasarts didn't waste years away developing The Dig (bollocks Spielberg sci-fi thing) and put more time into this. It all went downhill after this...

4 Indiana Jones & The Fate of Atlantis (1992)

Hooray for multiple paths and multiple endings! Don't like using your brain to solve puzzles? Beat the crap out of people instead! When I finished the game for the first time, I reached the sad ending. *Really* depressing for a 14 year-old. I spent hours and hours playing this game to see this?

3 Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge (1991)

Why was there never a talky version of this game? Even the first Monkey Island was blessed with one. Ah well. This game is special, particularly because its blessed with the *best ending to a video game ever*. How will they ever explain that one? I thought to myself. Cue worst introduction to a video game ever (Monkey Island 3 - no I'm not bitter)



2 Day of the Tentacle (1992)

Time travelling with toilets! Tentacles with stubby arms! Suicidal practical jokers! Re-writing the American Constitution! Classic-game-within-a-game years before Shenmue or Animal Crossing were words to drive fanboys into frenzies! There were some good drugs going around Lucasarts circa 1992.



1 Sam & Max Hit The Road (1993)

Point-and-click perfection. Combine irreverent (some would say childish) humour with a ridiculous plot involving Big Foot: surely a recipe for a terrible game? Not when you have a straight-talking canine and his insane little bunny sidekick going along for the ride. The Virtual Reality bit was hilarious. Oh, and you could play the CD on your stereo too.



Letters

Where were you lot between last issue and now, eh? Virtually no letters! Mind you, judging from some of those we have had that is probably for the best...

Do Something Special

I wept when I read your N64 Reality Check Article in **ugvm04**. It brought back so many wonderful memories. The moment when I first opened the console, plugged in Mario 64 & 'It's me Mario !!'. Bliss, sheer gaming BLISS. A moment I will treasure forever along with other Nintendoites (is that a word?).

I think the following games also deserve to be mentioned as quality N64 games: F-Zero X, Jet Force Gemini, Conker's Bad Fur Day and Paper Mario.

I would also agree that the SNES version of Mario Kart is better than the N64's (Cue: My 5 minute of fame with this comment in CVG Mag). I pray Nintendo do something special with the Gamecube version - TAKE IT ONLINE !!

Yours Nintendoingly,

KK - Pen Putaragi, via email

You'll be pleased, then, to see our review of F-Zero X this issue. And Conker's next issue. What a stroke of luck for you! Never let it be said that we don't listen to our readers. Ed.

We don't, usually. You rarely even listen to me! Tim.

A Major Game

Hi, great magazine once again, I love the 'By gamers for gamers' feel in combination with a professional attitude. However, I know it wasn't a major game on

the platform, but I think that Fighter's Destiny, although not a Soul Calibur beater, provided innovation in the genre that was under represented on the N64, and indeed the points system made the game a bit more strategic than other traditional beat-em-ups. IGN did a reasonably favourable review here <http://urlsnipped>.

Jim Shawe, via email

"Fighting Game" and "N64" rarely go together, do they? It was certainly one of the areas that the N64 fell down on, anyway. However, you can dump your Fighter's Destiny now that Soul Calibur 2 is out. It ROXXORZ. Apparently. Oh, and referring to IGN on here is like selling sweets on a stall in front of Woollies Ed.

A Very Sexy Way

Dear **ugvm**,

How come that I have a GBA Player which allows me to play all the latest and greatest GBA games on my lovely *spice orange* Gamecube in a very sexy way, but I spend 99% of my time just playing regular GB Tetris on it? Is it because GB Tetris is the most perfect game ever? I think it might just be.

Lovingly yours,

dickypoos xxx

'dickypoos', via email

Tetris isn't the most perfect game ever. In fact, it doesn't even come close to the genius that is "Where's Waldo?" on the Genesis. Hours of fun can be had from simply saying, "Where's Waldo?" before pointing excitedly at the screen and yelling "There he is! I win!". Not only that, but it is seemingly impossible to not complete it. Furthermore, should you still be having problems completing it, you can plug a second joypad in and use the buttons on it to automatically find Waldo for you, or stop the clock indefinitely, or even just quit the game and play something else instead. Like Home Alone! Now there is a game to ph33r... Ed.

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Here's what you do. Type up your submission, and send it to editor@ugvm.org.uk. Make sure it's all in plain text (so Notepad or Simpletext are good choices to type it into). Have a look at the review guidelines on the **ugvm** website (www.ugvm.org.uk) before you start, or we might come and burn down your house.

All fairly obvious really. The only thing we ask, and this is a legal thing and so quite important, is that the work is your own, and you are not just cut-and-pasting some review or article from another website or magazine.

As always, we the **ugvm** staff can be found in the newsgroup uk.games.video.misc, so you're free to talk to us there.

Please give generously.

* to achieve this, simply print out a copy of **ugvm** onto acetate. Then glue the acetate onto your TV screen. Ta da!

Hold The Back Page

Dear Teddy,

I'm sorry that I missed you today. I was out catching fish and insects and didn't notice the time. I caught a red snapper and some sea bass. Gaston bought one of my sea bass for 3000 bells! He must be a bit stupid. Thank you for sending me a present, but gingham isn't really my bag, I'm afraid.

Best Wishes, deKay

Dear Olivia,

Thanks for the bus stop you sent me in your last letter. It was really, er, great. Not quite what I was expecting from you after the eyelash-batting you gave me last time we met. Oh well. Anyway, here's a yellow umbrella for you.

With Love, deKay

Dear Maddie,

Where were you today? I called in on you several times but you weren't in! I hope you haven't been going to see Wart Jr again. I thought we had something special going on? Here is a nice gingham dress I bought today for you. Please wear it for me.

With Love, deKay

Dear Teddy,

What's with all the presents? Yesterday it was a gingham dress, and today some cherries and

double bed! I don't think I should be talking to you any more.

From deKay

Dear Olivia,

Ah, so the bus stop was just a rouse, eh? Well, thanks for last night - you were great. Here's some new carpet for you! I'll have to ditch Maddie. I hardly ever see her these days anyway, and I think she's seeing Wart Jr behind my back...

With Love, deKay

Dear Maddie,

Please come back! I promise - Olivia and I just talked! I was so lonely what with you going off to see Wart Jr all the time. I saw you wearing his clothes yesterday, even though I'd sent you that nice dress. Here is some pretty wallpaper for you, to show how sorry I am. I was just jealous, that's all!

With Love, deKay

To Teddy,

Right - that's it. I'm not speaking to you again. I swear you must be hitting on me, and I'm not like that at all. And you don't scare me with your threats of telling Maddie about me and Olivia. You have no proof, see? Stay away from me or I'll use my axe on you.

From deKay

Dearest Olivia,

It's all lies! I'm not seeing Teddy, whatever he says! He fancies me, but I've pushed him away at every advance, honest! I tried to dump Maddie last night, but she was out and I didn't get a chance to speak to her. I will, I promise. Then we can be together. Here are some coconuts for you - I know how much you like them.

With Love, deKay

Dearest Maddie,

NOOOOOO!! How could you do this to me? With Wart Jr of all the animals? Don't you know that he eats raw fish, and has nasty tropical diseases? I hope you get this letter before you move. Please reconsider. That Teddy is a vicious poison-spreader. Nothing is going on between me and Olivia. You've got to believe me.

With Love, deKay

Dear Olivia,

Please don't leave! Please! It isn't true! Teddy has been spreading lies about me!

With Love, deKay

Dear Teddy,

The girls have gone. I'm all yours, baby!

With Love, deKay

deKay

Next Issue in ugvm

Violence Special!

A whole issue devoted to guts, guns and gore. Bring a crowbar! Heck, bring two!

Guns! Power Up!

A **ugvm** look at light gun games since the Dawn of Time.

GTA: Vice City

The lowdown on this PS2 crime-spree simulator!

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More fighting, shooting, blowing things up, blood and violence than one magazine can legally contain!

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Get the bandages ready!

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